

**MOVEMENTS IN MODERN ENGLISH**  
**POETRY AND PROSE**

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# MOVEMENTS IN MODERN ENGLISH POETRY AND PROSE

BY

SHERARD VINES

WITH AN INTRODUCTORY NOTE BY

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## INTRODUCTION

I have been asked to write a short Preface to this book. Its author, Mr Sherard Vines, in days now fantastically distant, before the war, was my pupil at Oxford, and read essays to me under the Magdalen elms. To the pieties of that time I attribute the request with which I am now complying, for Mr Vines needs no support from his literary elders. He was then as now, a poet, and a critic of refreshing frankness and irreverence; not easily awed by the ritual of 'coteries' or the mumbo-jumbo of established reputation. Much has happened since then, to shake the tree of good and evil for both of us: four years of soldiering, and marks, moreover, to remind us of it. Yet still, in this amazing post-war world, with compass-bearings somewhat altered, we continue the old exploring game of literature. I have the temerity to 'profess' it in England, and he, with more justice, 'professes' (and produces) it in Japan.

He charges me, I observe, though more in sorrow than in anger, with literary reticence; it is time that I gave up essays and wrote a book. I must see what can be done, but am content, in the meantime, to enjoy the vigour of his example. He has drawn in ~~this~~ book one of the few maps obtainable of the English literary world at the present time, and has enriched his sketch with the running comment of an acutely interested observer who is himself in the general movement, and has either known or been a member\* of some of the groups which he describes. That the map is everywhere clear, that the soundings are all accurate, and all the currents correctly marked, he would probably be the last to pretend. The literary world in England was never more active or more confused, more bent on exploration or more uncertain of its routes. From their stir and dance of forces it is an advantage that the observer should interpose some distance. I think it probable that Mr Vines's station in another continent has improved the triangulation of his work.

That his book is contentious, and his judgments disputable, Mr Vines must be well aware. He speaks his mind in many questions

which no living person can decide I find myself sometimes dissenting from him, with a violence equal to his own ; which is all as it should be, and only shows that he is alive. I think him consistently too hard on the men, now middle-aged, whose stride was broken by the war I value some of them very differently I think that he takes, perhaps, too seriously, which is to repeat their own mistake, some of our post-war coteries the ' Baroque ' school, and the solemn leaders and second fiddles in the new orchestras of Reason I am startled by the gravity with which the work of young men is analysed into periods ' Richard Aldington in his later style ' In all this, of course, I may well be wrong Seniority gives no advantage in such matters, and when I differ from Mr Vines I never forget that he has the younger pulse. On one question which, because it is historical, lies a little more within my sphere, I should have liked to add a footnote Mr. Vines gives an interesting account of the new vogue of the Eighteenth century, but its origins are hardly seized It was prepared, very quietly, in the Universities by a handful of scholars, and it took by surprise most of the young men in London who now live on

it and are quite convinced they made it

But I must not digress My business is to recommend a thoroughly honest and outspoken book on a very interesting, very delicate, and highly debatable subject

GEORGE GORDON.

Oxford,

Sept 15, 1927.

## Prefatory Note

It is hoped that this book may be of some help to Japanese students in the study of the apparent movements, always baffling and often obscure, in modern English literature. The greater part of the matter contained in the pages that follow is drawn from lectures delivered at Keio University and elsewhere, but these have been here recast and expanded by means of extracts from articles written some time ago for the Tokyo Nichi Nichi, Osaka Mainichi and Mita Bungaku, the editors of which I beg to thank for their courtesy.

It will be noted that there is no mention of contemporary drama, it being impossible to do this subject anything like justice at so great a distance from the London and provincial theatres.

As to what is attempted here, the sketching of an outline of literary events that are taking place in another hemisphere must necessarily be attended by considerable difficulties. But my task has been lightened by the kind offices of Mr Edmund Blunden, Mr Nishiwaki, and Mr I A Richards, who have supplied me with indispensable material.

W S V

Keiogijuku University,  
1927



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## I. POETRY

In the normal course of events it may be expected that each generation will reject in a greater or less measure the art of that immediately preceding it, though in rare cases the artistic current runs deeply and swiftly enough to carry itself without divagation down fifty years or even more. Augustanism began with Denham and ended with Goldsmith,—to take two convenient landmarks; Pre-Raphaelitism is falling gently asleep in the Meynell school, or has suffered a painful metempsychosis at the hands of G. K. Chesterton. But to these longer tyrannies the reaction comes at length the more violently, whether in the form of Romantic or Intellectual revivals; it is purely an emotional matter, and of no value in helping us to determine whether one variety or school is in any way superior to another. The twentieth century has seen already two such reactions,—the “dash” for Nature made by Rupert Brooke a year or two before the war,

and the intellectualist movement away from Nature which, although it even had its own literary organ "Blast" (incidentally it was far from being exclusively intellectual) as early as 1914, was regarded at first in the light of a joke, and did not become a serious menace to the Georgian naturalist until the arrival on the field of other forces, such as the so-called "Wheels" coterie,—actually no coterie,—in 1916. The rapidity of this riposte to the mildly romantic groups of country-side poets of which we may regard John Drinkwater as the type, suggests that the spirit unifying them can be neither potent nor enduring. But Georgian poetry is by no means dead; the London Mercury, the most important periodical of those which represent this tendency, continues and apparently flourishes; the tame beauties of England's bucolic landscape are celebrated with unwaning enthusiasm. It would therefore be premature to announce as yet the obsequies of the Emotional and the accession of the Intellectual "pontiff"; indeed, the situation might almost be summed up by saying that there is one pope at Avignon and another at Rome. Mr. T. S. Eliot pronounces his edicts in the *Criterion*, Mr.

J C Squire his bulls in the *Mercury*.

Such are the party politics of poetry if regarded from the "tendency" point of view but this unfortunately fails to cover the entire ground. There are poets who defy both categories; others again who seem to qualify simultaneously for both. Mr Blunden is a case in point, this critic claiming him for the Georgians, while that one will allege that cubistic symptoms have characterised, if not marred, his later work. Messrs Robert Graves and Nichols again, seem to fall between two stools, or rather, to be perching upon stools of their own. But this does not prove of course that the main tendencies in question do not exist: they are plain enough to the most myopic of minds. There are also groups that represent transition stages. Of the Imagists who flourished some few years ago, few, qua Imagists, remain. The stars of the *Egoist* clique, who might have been identified with them, were Richard Aldington and T. S. Eliot, both of whom have become philosophers and didactic psychologists in verse.

Another factor enters the argument to confuse rather than to enlighten the investigator. Metre was once a pretty clear indication

of tendency; the Right adhered to rhyme, and the Left followed Marinetti and Laforgue into the labyrinth of free verse. But today both camps affect both fashions, Peter Quennell, a fairly late recruit to the Georgian forces, will offer us, for example a fine frenzy of this kind —

She became a bird, and bird-like danced  
On a long long sloe bough, treading the  
silver blossom  
With a bird's lovely feet

in which the heaviness alone guides us to the right party On the other hand Miss Sitwell may be found singing on the left, though not, of course, the extreme left, in neat running-on couplets —

All night, the harsh bucolic winds that grunt  
Through these green curtains, help me in my  
hunt

It will be incumbent upon us more than ever, in our search for a clue to the poetic age, to stick closely to the evidence, the sacred wood is here too dense to allow of a satisfactory perspective view

One fact clearly emerges, which is this, the poetry of immediate sentiment, after an unbroken sway, from Shelley to D H.

Lawrence, of more than a hundred years, during which the only marked signs of temporary deviation from the course appeared in Wordsworth and Browning, has found at length a rival sufficiently formidable to attract to itself several of the more powerful minds of the present decade furthermore, the number of those whose interest in Augustan literature is reviving seems to be increasing rather than otherwise, to judge from the regularity with which reprints from the eighteenth century are appearing But it remains to be seen whether these phenomena are anything more than a grand flash in the pan.

## THE EDWARDIAN REACTION

Before ten years of the present century had elapsed it was already apparent that English taste was undergoing a change, the abandonment of the urban artificialities of the "nineties" was so marked that to a distant observer it might appear to have been something very like a panic, a jostling flight of the aesthetic flocks, with Chesterton and Belloc as bell-wethers, for refuge in the bosom of mother nature. Perhaps it was that the intellectual pace of Wilde, Whistler and Lionel Johnson, which seems to us today so strictly moderate, was found then to be too hot, and the weary Edwardians, feeling themselves unable to maintain it, sought anxiously for something more sedative, and less likely to make demands upon their mental energy. Where this was so or not, they were soon provided with an appropriate type of art that is sometimes unassumingly simple, at other times becomingly disguised in a mask of profundity. Mr. Chesterton openly avowed himself the enemy of Oscar

Wilde and attempted, though unsuccessfully, to show that if Wilde could produce epigrams suitable for the drawing-room, he could apply the same order of wit to a more rustic background. Mr Belloc developed industriously the cult of native crudity seasoned with a mild erudition, and familiarised his public with the romantic figure of a poetical tramp (which Stevenson had already invented) carolling his way over Alpine passes or the Sussex Downs. The vogue for Bohemian life in Cafés or studios, so dear to George Moore and Arthur Symonds, fell upon evil days, the volumes of Baudelaire, Huysmans, or Rimbaud were laid aside, and their owners would go to the Haymarket theatre to steep themselves in the natural mysticism of Maeterlinck's *Blue Bird*, which became all the rage in 1911. Or wandering farther afield, they would share, with the aid of A. E. Housman, the joys and sorrows of the Folk, the too-long-neglected peasantry, whose songs Cecil Sharp and Vaughan Williams were already beginning to harmonise in a discreetly modern style, and whose dances were soon to be travestied upon the lawns of such of the Intelligentsia as possessed them.

The influence of A E Housman upon this diastolic movement was as profound as it was, apparently unintended. The "eclogues" which he published under the title of *The Shropshire Lad* were in the highest degree artificial, but this fact was willingly or unconsciously overlooked by the throng of neo-pagans who found in these expressions of rural pessimism an escape from the House of Pomegranates or the Garden of Eros. It was now but a short step thence to the seaside, the elemental hills, the allotment ground, and the kitchen garden—an easy transition from the absinthe of Baudelaire to the beer of Belloc. The return to the country is not unprecedented in the annals of English literature, for a very similar reaction occurred in the middle of the eighteenth century, though it was, of course, far less general. Poets like Dyer then voiced the nostalgia of those who, surfeited with bibulous nights at White's and Will's, craved once more that sylvan seclusion

on the mountain's lonely van  
Beyond the busy noise of man

Milton to them was very much as Housman



has been to the nature-worshipper of this century

It must not be forgotten that the "nineties" had had their own reaction from the precious and the polished; refreshment had been sought, not only in the crudity of Kipling, but in the Cockney genius of H. G. Wells. As he developed and the suckling twentieth century increased in years, so did his muse take more seriously to tales of "low life," of Mr Lewisham, Kipps, and Bert Smallways, so that when John Masefield appeared at the Georgian dawn with *The Everlasting Mercy* (1911) and, in the next year, *The Widow in the Bye Street*, literature was not unprepared. But by this time the atmosphere of heavy seriousness had literally consolidated itself. The Wells of *Tono-Bungay* was no longer the Wells of *The Wonderful Visit*, and in Mr Masefield's two slum poems, of the old formula "tears, cheers, and laughter," only the first item remained. The late Dixon Scott remarks with true insight that Masefield "heaves the Celtic sigh"—a pregnant phrase. Curiously enough, there was quite a rage at this time for Irish literature; volumes by W. B. Yeats might be seen occupying those very places

in drawing-rooms that are now usurped by the works of the Sitwell trinity. Masfield seems to practise sedulously the assumption of a grey and dreamy mood in the Irish manner, as he leaves the more Anglo-Saxon certainties of

The room stank like a fox's gut  
for a strained pursuit of

A wonder, a delight, a paleness passing soon  
Only a moment held, only an hour seen,  
Only an instant known in all that life has been,  
One instant in the sand to drink that gush of  
grace

The beauty of your way, the marvel of your face

The younger poets of the new school did not as a whole suffer from the severe overstrain that Masfield contracted in his hunt for "something — something — something" but quite a number of them heave, some more, some less gently, the Celtic sigh — "Grey," sings W. J. Turner, "are the broken walls of Conchubar", Iolo Aneurin Williams, then one of the youngest of the "Squirearchy," records this thought,

There may the grey heart sing  
How youth was stronger,

And love a far-off thing  
That hurts no longer,

in a genuinely Masfieldian quatrain

And W W Gibson, in a few melancholy  
lines, recites one half of the creed of the  
reaction

But we, how shall we turn to little things  
And listen to the birds and winds and streams  
Made holy by their dreams,  
Nor feel the heart-break in the heart of things?

But of this Heartbreak House Masfield  
occupied the entire ground-floor

## GEORGIAN POETRY

The full sweep of the Georgian pendulum—for through this catharsis we have now arrived at the rebirth of the poetic urge—may be measured by a comparison of, let us say, a lyric of Wilde's with one of Rupert Brooke's. Wilde treated the country in a decorative cavalier fashion. The formal garden was his country, in fact, nature adapted by man in opposition to nature ordering man to adapt himself to her. He expresses this attitude in *Le Jardin*,—even in the unnecessary French of its title

The lily's withered chalice falls  
Around its rod of dusty gold  
And from the beech-trees in the wold  
The last wood-pigeon coos its calls  
The gaudy leonine sunflower  
Hangs black and withered on its stalk

Rupert Brooke affects completely the childish delight of self-surrender to nature and to associations. In his poem *Grantchester*, he echoes the wistful fondness which an Englishman abroad may be expected to feel for his green water-meadows and starproof elms.

Ah God ! To see the branches stir  
 Across the moon at Granchester !  
 To smell the thrilling-sweet and rotten  
 Unforgettable, unforgotten  
 River smell, and hear the breeze  
 Sobbing in the little trees  
 Say, do the elm-clumps greatly stand  
 Still guardians of that holy land ?

Avoiding the cool colonnades of the grand manner, he establishes his spiritual home among the snug English villages, Shelford or Barton, "where men make cockney rhymes," and Babraham, where local manners have made "strong men cry like babes." Recoiling from the glare and vulgarity of the hotel, he finds comfort in the domestic tea-table, which he has to some extent immortalised in the lyric "Afternoon Tea." Of love he writes, "we've found love in little hidden places", and though in justice to him the quotation must be continued with "under great shades, between the mist and mire," his preference for small and homely things is patent, and contributes valuable evidence of the progress of what, in another connection Wyndham Lewis, a critic of the opposing faction, designates *hole-and-corner art*. Examining another

poem of Brooke's, *The Great Lover*, we find our case materially strengthened by an enumeration of the things that have had for him an especially intimate appeal, including the following household equipment amongst others —

White plates and cups, clean gleaming,  
Ringed with blue lines, and feathery, faery dust,  
The strong crust  
Of friendly bread, and many-tasting food

Then the cool kindness of sheets, that soon  
Smooth away trouble, and the rough male kiss  
Of blankets, gramy wood ...

Later on we come to

The benison of hot water, furs to touch,  
The good smell of old clothes

This might be called crude, but it is certainly vivid, like the verse of Edith and Osbert Sitwell, it exudes a harsh sweetness, by virtue of which all three in their two respective and opposing regiments stand apart. Brooke's art is that of spontaneity, and in that spontaneity its greatness lies: the evanescence of beauty, like the bluster of the wind in his native elms, appeals directly and for a moment to our emotions.

and passes. Solidity and grandeur are not to be found here, nor would they be at all appropriate to the temperament or method of the poet. How truly he might say of himself, "so lightly I played with these dark memories, just as a child"; his childhood was but partly conscious, or just conscious enough, perhaps for him to recognise this youthful element of play, and to exploit it with the happiest results. With him, the poetic world was rather too ready to relinquish the responsibilities of manhood, and return triumphantly to the nursery. The new childishness was but part of the drifting back toward little and simple things, and Brooke was not the only leader in this direction, Mr De La Mare became an household word, Mr Harold Monro, the author of a verse called "Milk for the cat," and impresario of a troupe of domestic poetesses. Rupert Brooke, had he lived, would no doubt have proved himself to be superior to either of these poets. The tragedy of his early death in 1915 is aggravated by the fact that the poem by which he became most famous was not so much a great poem as a great piece of war propaganda. He had something of the journalist's *flair* for the

“psychological moment” and the popular catchword; and his sonnet beginning “if I should die, think only this of me” exactly hit off the feeling, which it was then to the interest of the government and the satisfaction of the people to foster, that war was being waged for no sordid economic cause, but to protect “England’s green and pleasant land” from a soulless invader. Even so the greatness of Brooke vindicates itself, if we consider that that he won over in a single sonnet the affections of those patriots that Kipling and Newbolt had been wooing assiduously in a sequence of books.

Had he lived he would never, one feels confident, have developed the heavy prolixity which John Drinkwater and Lascelles Abercrombie have restored to English verse—though not in the unpretentious tradition of the post-Chaucerian age. Gower and Occleve prattled for the sheer joy, one might say, of hearing their own voices, but these, their\* modern counterparts, have selected, the former, contemplation, the latter, passion, as disguises or excuses for a wordiness that half conceals certain defects in the artistic process. What are these defects? In the case of Lascelles Abercrombie there can



hardly be said to be a perpetual absence of true emotional stimulus, since at moments it illumines, beyond all dispute, the 'dark desert' of his writings. One might, giving him the benefit of the doubt, conclude that some kind of obstruction, occasionally removed, lies between the primary emotion and its final expression, so that all too frequently, when the spirit roars in thorough-bass, the prophet squeaks in this kind of falsetto —

What, mother? O that little girl we met  
At midday I was thinking of, you know  
She let me put my hands upon her head,  
What a wonderful loveliness is that of hair  
Soft, smooth, delicious as the smell of gorse  
In sunlight

Irresistibly, and especially in the third line, we are reminded of the burlesque stanza beginning —

I put my hat upon my head  
And went into the Strand,

it is Wordsworthian prosiness without its prim dignity or the vision that, for him at least, altered so strangely the values of words. There was current in England at the time a theory that language must be Anglo-Saxon

at all costs, and that words of Latin derivation were too cold and pompous for literary use, they were banished to scientific treatises and the Press. In the lines just quoted we see Mr Abercrombie busy in his Germanic workshop, with something that shall be rugged, simple, and racy of the soil. Latinisms are now to be eschewed, for they might recall the Grand Manner of Davenant and Dryden. But there is more than this in Mr Abercrombie's use of language; the ruggedness is clearly intended not merely to reverse the Baroque tradition, but to add something of that sombre power which had been formerly the sole attraction of Carlyle. The Gothic theory that Beauty, being the Characteristic, may be licensed as far as ungraciousness, is still uppermost clearly so, when we read that

I made of my desires not ecstasy  
But lust, as rooms of mere delight  
I lived in passions

Or examine the address of the Seeker to the  
World

But thou hast mixed  
Sm into man, though like all else, his nature  
Is towards thee, this pricks away from thee

Or is it that the tether unto thee  
 As toothed and ragged gyves is fastened on him  
 So that to him cruel is thy constraint, etc

Lastly, the outspokenness of the language may be noted as, possibly, the expression of a greater frankness of attitude. Mr. Abercrombie brings once more into the poetic vocabulary the word "lust," in the use of which he was, very soon after, supported by John Helston, a minor poet of the "rugged" school, and author of *Aphrodite at Leather-head*

In his dramatic work the lurid fog of words begins to lift, the images to loom less dimly, we find that *The Sale of St Thomas*,—overlooking the crabbed and pretentious diction—is instilled with a vividness and life that rarely occurs elsewhere; the alarm of St Thomas, and the malicious description, on the captain's part of the horrors, "Flies .. that will drink not only - blood of bulls, tigers and bears, but pierce the river-horses' greasy skin," which await the Indian tourist, are forcefully portrayed. But in other pieces, such as *The End of the World*, the throne of inspiration is usurped by noise that borders at times even on rowdiness. The conversation between The Stranger and two persons

called Merrick and Huff can scarcely justify its existence, save as an example of this unlovely quality

*Stranger* I've seen the folk of the world  
yelling aghast,  
Scurrying to hide themselves,  
I want nought else  
Monstrous and dreadful

*Merrick* What had rouse 'em so? Some  
house afire?

*Huff* A huzzy flogged to death for her  
hard-faced adultery?

Dissonance has no virtue in itself; even sound and fury, without "significant form," begin at length to pall. The form of Lascelles Abercrombie has been praised by his admirers for its suppleness, and the manner in which, according to them, his complex rhythms bend and vary themselves to every change of mood. While it is true that he varies both metre and rhythm, it is no less true that variety of effect is but seldom the result, owing perhaps to a predominating woodenness—no other term seems applicable, which immobilises every gesture, whether in the irregular blank verse of the dramatic pieces, or the more lyrical rhythms of, say, *Ryton Firs*. If there is indeed anything in

this allegation of suppleness and subtilty, one can only regard other poets in whom these qualities are infinitely more developed, as prodigies of perfection. If there is such delicacy in the music of the quotations made above, how much more gracefully does it dwell in the following lines —

When the light tread of the dancers no  
 more, no more  
 The throbbing pulse of the drum, the  
 fiddle-bows glancing  
 Ruffled the heavy hush of the park at dawn,

the writer of which is at present, compared with Professor Abercrombie, the most junior of tyros. It may be accused of a lack of virility by such as confound a light motion with a feminine temperament, but it certainly is neither harsh nor awkward, which cannot honestly be said of a fair amount of Abercrombie's work.

The virtues of Mr Abercrombie are not shared by John Drinkwater, into whose poetry the dull oppression of the English midlands has more permanently entered. He suffers, moreover, from the stigma of having been found out, the young critic of today is perhaps too ready to dismiss, as pinch-

beck, the products of his craft, without so much as a word of praise for the industry and persistence, that have gone to endow them with a most creditable appearance of the true metal. It is certainly to his credit that he passed for one of the leading English poets during a substantial period, and that even now there are some who speak reverently of his dramas. If he is wanting in poetic vision, he has two very useful substitutes for it; ingenuity, and an unflinching, though not perhaps very striking, fount of language. He inhabits an altogether more peaceful sphere than Abercrombie, from which all mention of huzzies flogged to death for adultery, or of frantic lechery, is sternly banished, at the same time he is on the whole less successful in maintaining the illusion of sincerity. Playing instead for safety rather than for sensation, he will describe a mild love in a calmly rural atmosphere.

At any moment love unheralded  
Comes and is king. Then, as with a fall  
Of frost, the buds upon the hawthorn spread  
Are withered in untimely burial,  
So love, occasion gone, his crown puts by  
And as a beggar walks unfriended ways

There is nothing original here to distress the mind. Love comes in as a king and departs as a beggar, his withering suggests frostbitten hawthorn buds. Images of this kind are the dear, familiar currency of minor verse, it is difficult to open an anthology,—and many such exist to-day in England—, selected from humbler poets, without meeting at the first glance some one of these well worn delights, and without suspecting that the field of Mr Drinkwater's influence is a wide one. This, for instance, is not his work, for though the wording might be his, the rhythm has a lilt in the Kipling manner.

When our years burn low like a candle  
That flickers across the moor

It was written by Frederick Creech Jones. But the plain countryside glamour is there, in the flickering candle and the moor. Both have busied themselves in "making song memorial of simple men and minds, not bowed to cunning." If any cunning is to be preserved it consists in a certain botanical conscientiousness in the Tennysonian tradition; scenes like the one that, "summer-blanch'd was parcel-bearded with

the travellers' joy, in autumn ivy-clad," must be described with some show of accuracy, and the more general method of the 18th century landscape school will no longer pass muster. Mr Drinkwater plays this game rather more discreetly than Tennyson, and with less of an air of thrusting his virtuosity at the reader, as may be seen from this description of trees in June —

The chestnut cones were in the lanes  
Blushing and eyed with ebony  
And young oak-apples lovingly  
Clung to their stems with rosy veins  
Threading their glossy amber

This passage is unusually rich, though less so than many by Edmund Blunden in his earlier manner. We are led to expect more frequently something as jejune as this —

Again towards the friendly vale  
the banks whereon the bracken burned  
And the last foxglove bells were spent and pale  
Down to a hallowed spot of English land

The hallowed spot of English land was then at the height of its poetic, if not of its commercial, value, since then it has rather depreciated as an asset in literature, and the



moderns are, it seems, only too glad to place their capital abroad

Drinkwater's diction is a compromise between the stark Saxon and the ennobled "Poetic" "I turned me," he says, "from that place in humble wise"; the fine cliché "in humble wise," is what adds an air of distinction to the line, as the word "baubles" does in the sentence "this cheat that uses us as baubles for her coat" They are just the kind of words that one would have expected to encounter in the novels of G P R. James The student might enquire why English poetry was permitted to retain at this time such fustian clothing, one might suggest, by way of answer, that sensitiveness to form was not as yet fully reawakened from the torpor into which it fell after the demise of fin-de-siècle preciosity. Anything seems to have been acceptable provided that it was not Wildian and "wicked" The search for the living word began later, and still continues, carrying the younger poets into extravagance and back again to more moderate paths

His rather voluminous dramatic works, apart from the fact that they need not occupy much of the time of the general reader, any more than the tragedies of Hoole

or William Havard would,\* need not be examined here. The poetical parts of them are up to the samples given above, and the yaffle obtrudes itself into *Abraham Lincoln*.

The emotions of W W Gibson are more deeply stirred, the surge of his poetry more tumultuous, his thirst for colour more marked. But here again expression lags behind, handicapped with a timid vocabulary and a fatal tendency to bathos, from the tumult of whatever passions may have stirred him, we hear such faint, and distinctly conversational voices as these

(he) knew the hunt was hot upon his track  
 Yet hardly seemed to mind, somehow, just  
 then  
 But kept on wondering why they looked so  
 black

And we may keep on wondering why such information is committed to metre; or why we and our older, and as we believed wiser, friends gladly accepted in those days the commonplace for its own sake. As for Mr Gibson's thirst for colour, it may be found after all that it is easily slaked with such

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\* Hoole's *Cyrus* and Havard's *King Charles I* were admired in the 18th century, but today they are comparatively unknown.

phrases as "the peacock sea," "lush, rank green," "his coppery shoulders agleam," all of which suggest the vast morass of minor poetry rather than the brilliance and vividness that seem to be intended. The vocabulary is taken now and then with Anglo-saxon attitudes, or with a more general craving for the Germanic ;

The snipe

As though clock-wakened, every jack  
An hour ere dawn, dart in and out  
The mist wreaths filling syke and slack

*The Hare* attempts in the metre, and something after the manner of Masfield in his *Everlasting Mercy*, the recital of a rather lurid passion in the "primal" setting of a Gipsy encampment. The taste for gipsy life, promoted largely by the works of George Borrow, was at this time being satisfied by means of holidays spent in Caravans, at Gipsy comic operas, or more cheaply by reading poetry of this kind. It was yet another of the exits to field and hedgerow that students of Richard Jeffries and *Lavengro* were enthusiastically thronging. Mr Gibson gave them tempting glimpses of a dull pastoral life remote from Spenser or Gibson gave them tempting glimpses of a dull pastoral life remote from Spenser or

Browne, of the tents of travelling circuses on village greens, where they discuss camels, boxing, Greek sculpture and shaving water. The characters in the "playlet" referred to speak in the poetic-naturalistic style practised by Abercrombie they say "naught" instead of "nothing" and "twill" for "it'll". In *The Devil's Edge* and *Neighbours*, a few short excursions into the region of the Eerie in which women under the stress of emotion "seek the door with queer wild eyes, and wander singing all the night," or exclaim

Who's there?

I only feel a cold wind in my hair,"

bring him to the edge of that moonlit land of the night-nursery and of fantasy shared by Algernon Blackwood and Walter De La Mare. But even here he preserves a mediocrity which, devoid of the restfulness of Drinkwater's *aurea mediocritas*, is less striking: it is neither Drinkwater's gossip nor Masfield's provincial melodrama.

W. H. Davies rose to eminence at this juncture because he was a super-tramp,—a kind of incarnation of the "Zeit-geist": but he would have been noticeable in any

age for the fact that he is a poet. The fruits of his wanderings by slum, sea, and moor are lyrics which even those who cannot love them must admire, for their freshness, adroitness and neat execution. No poet, writing in these days of the country or of "low life" can avoid clichés, the thing has been done too many times. But like the industrious caddis fly, Mr Davies weaves of these dead fragments a harbour for new life, and that his own Nightingales, for example, have too many times, in literary history, lured the poet forth to some melodious plot of beechen green; but

Too many times have nightingales  
Wasted their passion in my sleep,  
And brought repentance soon  
But this one night I'll seek the woods,  
The nightingale, and moon

The plan—a direct record of a simple emotion, is as guileless as the execution. Davies is as outspoken, as truthful, as one of his cuckoos, his very genuineness disarms the critic who may feel inclined to condemn en masse the work of the previous decade. Whether afield in the hawthorn season, or listening in a public-house bar on a wet

night to the tale of Nell, who was "bad for all you men, unclean, a thief as well," his conduct will never betray anything that may be construed as a pose; he is the one Georgian "back-to-nature" poet whose deportment is impeccable. The more so because he will not accept the title of nature poet, so eagerly offered, without modestly questioning his entire fitness for it.

Call me a nature-poet, nothing more,  
 Who writes of simple things, not human evil,  
 And hear my grief when I confess that friends  
 Have done their best to make a cunning devil!

Nature, on closer acquaintance, has proved less trustworthy, the adoration of "Secrets" is demonstrably less whole-hearted than of old.

Walter De La Mare, whose fiction will be discussed later, requires mention here as an exponent of the mildly *macabre*, for those who are fond of this flavour, he caters daintily and efficiently. His phantoms are elegant, and cause the spirit, rather than "this our flesh" to creep. Nothing in his world is sufficiently definite or tangible to horrify, like the screaming skulls or malefic willow-trees of the professional ghost-story.

teller    The skiamantic magic of "The Listener" is the best and most characteristic of its kind

But only a host of phantom listeners  
That dwelt in the lone house then  
Stood listening in the quiet of the moonlight  
To that voice from the world of men,  
Stood thronging the faint moonbeams on  
the dark stair  
That goes down to the empty hall  
Harkening in an air stirred and shaken  
By the lonely traveller's call

Mr De La Mare has two other strings to his elfin lute, childhood, and late spinsterhood, and of both he makes a phantom music of the sort that can only be described as "pretty," and "haunting" it trips and is wistful at the same time

Is it the elfin laughter  
Of fairies riding faint and high,  
'Neath the branches of the moon,  
Straying through the starry sky?

It is the description is exact In a different key, but with similar harmonies, he sings of a maiden lady

When thin-strewn memory I look through  
I see more clearly poor Miss Loo,

Her tabby-cat, her cage of birds,  
Her nose, her hair, her muffled words

Surely, one might exclaim, Ambrose Phillips must have returned, charged with ghostly reminiscences, from the world of shadow

J C. Squire is one of those who may be said to aspire to literary dictatorship in England. But today a single member of our puny posterity will not suffice to fill a place once occupied by the massive form of Doctor Johnson, and so a small cluster of oligarchs, more or less in harmony with one another, make what shift they can. Among these may be numbered Mr Squire, together with Sir Edmund Gosse, "E M", who can be none other than the "Freddie Mush" of H G Wells' *Men Like Gods*, and Harold Monro, keeper of the now famous Poetry Bookshop, where Professor Yone Noguchi once gave a recitation at one of the weekly poetry meetings. J C Squire is the most versatile, and possibly the most energetic (at present), of these shining ones. He is a parodist, an essayist, a poet, and above all things, a journalist. For a long time his periodical, *The London Mercury*, has represented all that is 'sweet and sane'



in the Georgian mood of English poetry  
 Today the number of those who speak ill of  
 it seem to have grown, but we must not  
 allow mere numbers to dictate to us Now  
 as much as yesterday, the upper middle  
 class, when it feels disposed to read poetry,  
 cannot do better than purchase the London  
 Mercury Sir Edmund Gosse, when he was  
 as yet a commoner, and the mouthpiece of  
 that social division, had said of this paper,  
 "hold it in your heart" There are others,  
 it is true, who do not say so, and one  
 lampoonist whose name I forget, went so  
 far as to write a satire upon it,—a poor and  
 scurrilous thing, it is true, but enough to  
 show that the Mercury is little more than  
 a party magazine. The God Mercury is  
 imagined to have visited the office of the  
 paper named after him, in its editor's  
 absence

#### Unseen

Rests Mercury, and reads a magazine  
 In which much praise of dullness now appears  
 He looks to see the name, alas! There leers  
 His face, his own, that once spelt speed and joy  
 Drawn on the cover by the office-boy.  
 The messenger of God rests where he read  
 In awful peace For Mercury is dead,

As dead as can be, dead as Anne the Queen  
 Or as that deadeast dullest magazine

Here is a good chance for a new Dunciad entirely "muffed", that the occasion could arouse no keener satire than this is clear proof of the atony into which English letters had lapsed. It was not by such means that Mr Squire was to be extinguished, though it may have added something to the apparently increasing wave of doubt as to the validity of some of his poems as poetry. Whatever they may not be, none can deny their ingenuity. There is an intellectual, a literary tang which must not be sought among the elders, Abercrombie and Drinkwater, and Masfield, father of the rugged manner. There are traces of Baudelaire, strangely incongruous in a setting of obviously English manufacture; there is a poem to Catullus. His earlier work is consciously introspective as a whole, and, like much introspection, is not sufficiently applied to universality to make it of more than transient interest. Do we wish, or is it necessary for us to know that "beneath my skull-bone and my hair, covered like a poisonous well, there is a land .."? Even the simile of the poisonous well, which

is after all but a touch of academic morbidity, and one of the things that "every young poet ought to know," has not provided an adequate excuse. It is decadence becoming tame, the prodigal son sniffing roast veal and determining to settle down. And in another poem where he refers to the lust for experience, for the satisfaction of having been satisfied in every way before the end comes, it will be seen that what might have been a superb gesture of despair, and perhaps contrition, at the café-table of the "nineties," is now modified to the cosier dimensions of the Georgian tea-table. The theory of eating of the fruit of every tree in the garden of life was enunciated by Wilde, it is mentioned here, but how differently! Here one may remark the transition, if not quite from Wilde to Wilcox, at least from the Bohemian conscience to the Nonconformist.

We pass from this interesting and presumably experimental stage to maturity, and find *The Lily of Malud*. We are at the left of the Georgian right, where complexity increases, the very language betrays an acuter conflict. The Victorian style, with its "and they know not why they go," "something sorrowful and far," "and each maid ere she

leaves . . .," confronts more modern colloquialisms like "where the boles of giant trees *stand about in twos and threes*" or "making drums *out of guts*," the word 'guts' having a hearty and at the same time intimate value . or again the georgian chattiness may at any moment be encountered , " and stare softly at the ember *and try to remember* " The exotic struggles with the homely, or rather, this poem, like much of the work of W J Turner, presents the spectacle of an homely mind striving to be exotic.

And the towering unseen roof grows more  
intricate, and soon  
It is featureless and proof to the lost  
forgotten moon

" Towering unseen," " featureless and proof," "lost forgotten", what is this mass of adjectives but the fruits of a normal intellect labouring at the production of synthetic romance? Yet not a single one of them conveys that sense of the characteristic which is surely requisite to this particular kind of art, their merit is that they are not quite usual The intention is to convey intense concentration on the purity and pallor of the lily, springing from the " primal mud," in

its setting of African marsh, forest and night, unfolding luminously in a black world that should be sinister and savage, and the contrast between black and white, between the black and savage "now," and "something holy in the past" Yet somehow it does not succeed, the forest of Eugene O'Neill in *The Emperor Jones* is alive with terrors, produced effectively enough by not very subtle means: but the forest of Mr Squire, except that it is populated by "groups of slender naked girls Whose black bodies shine like pearls," might be Ueno Park

The failure to convey either outline or atmosphere may be due to a vagueness that is essentially Nordic, and to an insufficient sensibility to the significance of words Epithets, we have seen, fall wide of the mark, and similes very short of it "Girls . like pearls," a stock property of any popular song, "like bathers by a river," "like little phantom fauns," "like a goddess in her power," "a ghost like a flower," "a flower like a queen," come, weighted with their tameness, too soon to earth Greater concentration might have resulted in that union of impulse with presentment which ensures a keen and a vital art. But as it is,

a barrier seems to intervene, as it were of glass, not many-coloured, but slightly opaque, admitting blurred and "woolly" simulacra of the radiances of eternity

This is the callous, cold resort of art  
 'I give you this' What do I give? To whom?  
 Words to the air, and balm to my own heart,  
 To its old luxurious and commanded smart

It is indeed seldom that the filmy window is is opened; but possibly for the Georgians the saintly visage of Beauty is too bright to hit the sense For Squire is not alone in this fatal tendency to blur; it would seem to be as regular a practise among this "wing" of poetry as the use of bitumen to give a mellow effect was among the Rembrandtesque painters in the old days In the London Mercury plenty of examples are to be found

Edward Shanks, lieutenant of this particular group that is known jocularly as "the Squirearchy," mars his simpler nature-descriptions with the same half-heartedness of the creative spirit. While his intentions are evidently of the best, their energy has half dissipated itself, as so frequently happens with good intentions, by the time that it

comes to performance Clutching, he just misses the skirts of the fleetfooted goddess beauty How nearly this succeeds, and how regrettable its lapse downward into the slough of 'general utility' nature-poetry .

We may touch the faint violets with the hands  
of thought,  
Or lay the pale core of the wild arum bare  
And for ever in our minds the white wild  
cherry is caught,  
Cloudy against the sky and melting into air  
This which we have seen is eternally ours  
No others shall tread in the glade which now  
we see,  
Their hands shall not touch the frail tranquil  
flowers,  
Not their hearts faint in wonder at the wild  
white tree

Housman, incidentally, could make something very much finer of the wild cherry Without craft there can be no conviction, for the reader, at least Georgian poetry is an enigma; with all the appearance of debility and decline, with an increasing pack of critics baying at its heels it maintains, "faint but pursuing" its level way./ Probably there will always be a public in England for poetry purged of excess and of that vision that may be too dangerously acute for peace of

mind, for a sort of comfortably upholstered lounge where the soul may enjoy mild transports. How truly speaks one of this convention in unconscious comment on the general method —

But the blind one, in her wicker cage,  
without ceasing  
Haunts this night of spring with her  
stuttering call  
Knowing nothing of the terror that  
walks in darkness\*

This careful isolation, not from realism, but from Reality, which is a very different thing, is one of the points of contact of this motley press of poets. E. M., writing a preface in 1922, seemed eager to suppress as far as possible the phenomenon of a point of contact, or of the brush that tars the tribe. "I should like," he says, "to enter a mild protest against a charge that *Georgian Poetry* has merely encouraged a small clique of mutually indistinguishable members to abound in their own and each others' sense or nonsense. It is natural that the poets of a generation should have points in common; but to my fond eye those who have graced

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\* *The Quails* by Francis Brett Young



these collections look as diverse as sheep to their shepherd. . . , and if there is an allegation that I would *deny with both hands*, it is this that an insipid sameness is the chief characteristic of ' (this) "anthology "

This is putting the case in its extreme form, and anyone will admit, even after a cursory examination, that there are several nuclei in the Georgian organism, but, viewed at a distance, and in relation to other groups or movements, its organic nature becomes all the more apparent. Something is seen to be present in the writings of Gordon Bottomley and De La Mare, which is absent from those of Ezra Pound and John J Adams, and vice versa. Both of the former are purveyors of fantasy 'upholstered' in the comfortable manner described above,—to select one special feature. Bottomley wakes from dreams of "Mycenae and great Zimbabwe" merely to speculate whether

in Nirvana or the Heavenly courts  
The principle for beauty shall persist  
or to sigh, with a reminiscence of Housman

O, Cartmel bells ring loud, ring clear,  
Through midnight deep and hoar,  
A year new-born, and I shall hear  
The Cartmel bells no more

He shares, it may be remarked in passing, with Abercrombie the function of supplying the Georgian academe with dramatic poetry. The writer recollects witnessing a performance of one of Bottomley's plays—an affair of Neo-Celtic wailing in blue shadows, in 1922, the year in which the notorious Horatio Bottomley was convicted of some crime of swindling. The play was being received with moderate indifference (it was of the sapless kind that appeals neither to "high" or "low-brow"), when some wag cried from the gallery, "they've imprisoned the **WRONG** Bottomley." This was severe, but not altogether unmerited. The dramas have all the curious inefficacy of Yeats, but the Celtic sigh is heaved once more on the wrong side of the Irish channel. In opposition to such other-worldiness as this may be placed an essay in bluff heartiness by Richard Hughes, himself a dramatist of very different calibre.

Poets, painters, and puddings, these three  
 Make up the world as it ought to be  
 Poets make faces  
 And sudden grimaces etc

An unfortunate piece in the quasi-robust vein, and an example of what Coleridge

might have called "the intellectual play" that becomes more evident in the younger Georgianism,—possibly as a protest against accusations from the left of intellectual bankruptcy.

It would be inaccurate to complain of "an insipid sameness" in *Georgian Poetry*, but not to see in the works of the authors referred to in the foregoing remarks a certain sameness of insipidity. The cause of this malady is not at first clear, since there are to be found in the mass of poetry plenty of those elements that are popularly supposed to ensure strength and vividness, works with strong emotional images and associations attached to them, strongly coloured descriptions, There is perhaps no one who illustrates this point better than D H Lawrence, who is obviously working for a vivid and striking effect

All in their scarlet cloaks and surplices  
Of linen go the chanting choristers,  
The priests in gold and black

The origins of the malady are probably not precisely the same in every case, in some,—in Abercrombie perhaps, it is defective communication due to a false aesthetic

theory; his peculiarities of language seem to point to this. In others, e.g., Harold Monro, it may be due to a choice of inferior subjects, due again to an aesthetic fallacy which leads many Georgians to persuade themselves that thoughts that lie too deep for tears may be given, not so much by both grand and puny things, as by the puny rather than by the grand. But in practice the thoughts stimulated by feeding cats or going for week-ends do not lie too deep for tears. Subject itself is not all; it is often used—always, one might dare to say, for conveying a larger experience, it appears to be this larger experience that, with so many of the Georgians, is of insufficient value. One would like to say that the value of an experience depends (when that experience is recreated as a work of art) on the efficiency with which the impulses that go to make that experience are organised. Some artists fail, though they try to organise the whole of the impulses, others seem to disregard the more troublesome, the stronger impulses, because they are diffident about controlling them and are afraid of losing equilibrium. They choose the lesser equilibrium in obedience to the motto, “safety first.” Thus Harold Monro

may have shunned the deeper dramatic issues in his "Children of Love," and contented himself with the more controllable prettiness of

"Marvellous dream.

Cupid has offered his arrows for Jesus to try;

He has offered his bow for the game

But Jesus went weeping away, and left him  
there wondering why"

Or again, his total experience may never have been deeper than this. But the value of an experience does not seem to be quite so simple a matter, it depends also on the value which the "experiencer" gives it. The mystic sometimes and the bigoted doctrinaire always lacks judgement, and tends to give an arbitrarily high value to a certain kind of experience, while a cloud of satellite poetasters will adopt these special kinds of experience because they have been made the fashion. But the experience at once loses value for these very reasons. This phenomenon may be seen in Georgian poetry (vide supra, Gibson and the provincial anthologies); but other schools of poetry are ~~are~~ similarly limited (e.g., the Sitwells, particularly Osbert)

Lastly the question of "unintentional beauty" comes up for consideration. It cannot be denied that some works of art, while failing to express the conscious intention of the artist, sometimes become satisfactory in an unexpected manner. The Gothic buildings of Pugin and Scott, especially the latter, have entirely failed to preserve or revive the spirit of the mediaeval architects, but they have achieved (the Albert Memorial, for example) a beauty which is certainly not the beauty of Gothic architecture. It would be easy to explain that this is purely accidental, but might it not be rather the result of unconscious intention? Even as a sham, a thing may possess a certain satisfying consistency. The sham nature-lyrics of Drinkwater, if re-examined in the light of this suggestion, may be found to carry the same kind of beauty which is now being discovered in the Albert Memorial.

### THREE POETS OF THE WAR, AND AFTER

Siegfried Sassoon, Robert Nichols, and Robert Graves, persons of very different methods and points of view, made their reputations by writing poems about the European War, but the slender bond that then united them has been long severed, and each has chosen his own path. All three have contributed to the anthology, *Georgian Poetry*. Siegfried Sassoon boldly supported the minority who presumed to doubt the advantages of war, and his outspokenness made something of a sensation at the time. His poetry was then the fruit of a direct reaction to a very strong "*saeva indignatio*" at the acute sufferings of the soldier, and the callousness of his employers and the non-combatants who were managing successfully to amuse themselves at home while the private is preparing to

. . .                   trudge

Up to the trenches, and my boots are rotten.  
Five miles of stodgy clay and freezing sludge,  
And everything but wretchedness forgotten

Tonight he's in the pink, but soon he'll die  
And still the war goes on, *he* don't know why

The sincerity of his resentment cannot be questioned, as he tells us, it is love for his fellow-soldier that

drives me back to grope with them through hell,  
And in their tortured eyes I stand forgiven

The evil effects of War, he is careful to note, reach into the future and order grimly the private lives of men. God appears in a sinister aspect

For George lost both his legs, and Bill's stone-blind  
Poor Jim's shot through the legs and like to die,  
And Bert's gone syphilitic  
And the Bishop said the ways of God are strange ' "

His honesty and extreme sensitiveness carry him safely through dangerous places and one feels that for any other poet to set up an unfortunate bishop as an Aunt Sally would be nothing but a cheap trick. The resignation of hopelessness succeeds the more active mood as he realises that protest is useless, that the next great war will be as popular as the last, and that "dying eyes



and lolling heads, those ashen-grey masks of the lads who once were keen" will once more become common-place incidents

Both before and since the period of war-poetry Sassoon was attracted, like many of his generation, to the country as a subject, and of the English hunting shires he etched vignettes in a charming enough and orthodox fashion, with red coats in the foreground and hamlet steeples in the distance. Since then, after travelling far, he has returned more soberly to discover perhaps, in scenes that inspired him in youth a deeper meaning, a way of purgation from the mental unrest induced by the war

beauty came like the setting sun  
My heart was shaken with tears, and horror  
Drifted away

Curiously enough, a critic in *The Daily Herald*, (a mildly socialistic English Journal) accused Siegfried Sassoon, the rebel poet, of capitalistic leanings, because he mentioned fox-hunting, the sport of the rich, in some of his poems. Such is the lamentable effect of politics on literary criticism.

The spontaneity and directness of expression, unadorned, and innocent of self-consciousness, that is the essence of his style,

must not be sought in any of the writings of Robert Nichols, whose faults do not include that of over-reticence. He is generous; he gives with both hands, so that there is a temptation to call him the spendthrift of poetry. Even if carried to excess this is a better short-coming than the reservations and stiffnesses with which the older Georgians try but fail to maintain dignity. He has been accused of being rhetorical, as though that were a disgrace, but there is no crime in rhetoric, and Monro, when he says, "it is difficult to separate the genuine from the merely poetical, the soldier from the rhetorician," is of course writing under the influence, among others, of the Georgian reluctance to use "fine language" and "the grand gesture," which the pedants of the decade abhorred as much as Ruskin did Claude Lorraine. If Robert Nichols has made some regrettable mistakes, if he has a certain number of Elizabethan and Romantic revival clichés instead of the far less tolerable Georgian clichés, he has also done poetry valuable service in restoring vigour to its sadly etiolated modes of expression. It is improbable that many would fail to react more strongly to the line

“Darkling with soundless sail all set and amply filled”

(even if they remember when and where Keats employs the word “darkling) than to the line, already quoted above

and stare softly at the ember, and try to remember

which after the other, sounds like a half articulate mumbling Self-consciousness, again, is not necessarily undesirable, except where it produces an appearance of insincerity, as it does, one must confess, from time to time in some of his lyrics More unfortunate are the moments at which, missing foothold in an intricate equilibristic feat, he falls heavily to earth; or when the voice vibrating in the full ardour of declamation, breaks into an unlovely scream. These accidents, unprovided for, occur at painful intervals which must be forgiven,—even unconvincing impressionism of this kind;

Revolver levelled quick.  
Flick Flick!  
Red as blood  
Germans Germans.  
Good! O Good!  
Cool Madness.

It is In fact, the war-poetry of Nichols, re-read in 1926, seems rather damaging than (as it actually was), helpful to a reputation. The more economical craft of Sassoon has triumphed, as in his conciser description of "dying eyes, and lolling heads—those ashen-grey masks of the dead," while Nichols has been vainly spending words in the hope of reaping a similar profit

O the fading eyes, the grimed face turned bony  
 Open mouth gushing, fallen head  
 Lessening pressure of a hand shrunk, clammed  
 and stony,  
 O sudden spasm, release of the dead

It is presumably the more literary portion of his verse that has been called derivative and certainly, we are sometimes reminded of Shelley, or of the Shakespearian sonnet-sequence, (as in *Aurelia*) The fact that he uses a phrase here and there from some other poet should not excite special comment in these days, when poetry is becoming more and more allusive and bristles with quotations from older masters. What, if the more conservative attitude about "plagiarism" were maintained, should one say of Marianne Moore? Similarly, he might be accused

of writing fustian poetry because he prefers "a virgin fierce" in the inverted order instead of "a fierce virgin" in that of Colloquial Spoken English. Yet not many years have passed since such inversions of language were considered only less shocking than those which still offend our moral code. It is refreshing to see once more a reminder in language that the "fitting" form is seldom that prescribed by current vogue, and a protest against the whole miserable crew of those who, pinning their faith to an arbitrary theory of diction, strangle (to change the figure abruptly) poetic experience at birth. Nichols had evidently learnt that such limits are fatal to anyone who would be "left free and puissant to range the solemn walks of time," and openly acknowledging the suitability for his particular experience of the then too despised (but now too admired) Baroque expression, writes

Though the wind roars, and Victory,  
A virgin fierce, on vans of gold  
Stoops through the wind's white smother rolled  
Over the army's shock and flow.

There is no image here that is strikingly original, in the component parts of the

picture ; but the whole is valuable as the record of a moment of neural equilibrium

Poetry has proved, so far, to be Nichols' 'trump card' ; in the drama *Culdy Souls*, the compromise between Granville Barker and William Blake is bound to appeal only to the eccentric and the suspicion of 'autism' in the prose stories "Fantastica," will probably make the ordinary reader cautious in his approach. But in his verse, the candour of stripping the soul and of clothing it by heroic experiment in declamatory garments,—in these are spectacular events that none should miss here indeed are "tears, cheers, and laughter." With him form bears a more important relation to content, but as neither are subordinated to the other, he cannot be placed among those who participate in the Form-Content war, as futile and protracted as the civil campaigns in China.

In the days of his war-poetry Robert Graves was playfully described as "a khaki bib" ; and the engaging juvenility of that martial phase has remained, with the aid perhaps of little intensive cultivation, until this day. Childish things are not discarded, and there are but scanty signs of migration from the (Peter) frying-pan of youth to the fire

of mature experience The naiveté of Rupert Brooke is left far behind, but here there is no compensation in the shape of sudden arrow-like flights aloft

The great wings were spread  
 Showering glory on the fields, and fire  
 The whole air singing bore him up, and higher,  
 Unswerving, unreluctant

Even so simple an affirmation of manhood as this (from Brooke's *Mary and Gabriel*) is a hard thing for Robert Graves During the war, some might have excused him for

The trouble is, things happen much too quick,  
 Up jump the Boches, rifles thump and click,  
 You stagger, and the whole thing fades away,

for all things, even prattling like a babe, were forgiven to the warrior But when the chatty method is applied to "non-combatant" subjects like astronomy, (" 'yes, he's talking of stripping *me* bare of my own big fur,' says the She-bear"), one can but point to it mournfully as an example of the disastrous effect of an unsound art-theory The Patchwork Bonnet, The Troll's Nosegay, are no less depressing; yet it must be admitted that he has made some efforts to break his fatal liaison with the nursery,

without contributing anything of supreme significance to poetry Here he may be seen in a grown-up mood

If I speaking gruffly, this mood is  
 Mere indignation at my own  
 Shortcomings, plagues, uncertainties,  
 I forget the gentler tone

But the whole of the poem (*Sullen Moods*) whence the quotation is taken strikes one immediately and eventually as trifling, beside the more "universal" poetry of Meredith, or Richard Aldington in his later style.\*

### *Ralph Hodgson*

Walter De La Mare has been classed as a "specialist" poet, but this term would apply more suitably to Professor Hodgson of Sendai University, who is innocent of any of those concessions to cheapness that make De La Mare more popular (The song *Nod* is a good example of such a concession)

One might feel inclined to say of Hodgson at first, "he is a priest rather than a poet," but afterwards, "he is too passionate to carry out sacerdotal functions, he is Moses

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\* cf, also the more recent *Marmosite's Miscellany*, which suffers from a fatal and quasi skeltonic garrulity



rather than Aaron " He must not, of course, be judged by such brief but violent protests, with their facile appeal, at cruelty to animals, as *The Bells of Heaven or Stupidity Street*, any more than Moses should be judged solely from the transient mood of irritation in which he brake the tables of the Law Preoccupation with animals may signify one arbitrary and so false value . but this cannot prevent the grander music, since it is there, from sounding The awful shadow of an unseen power is not to be concealed by R S P C A propaganda, but on the contrary mercifully obscures it What is the Unseen Power? Not, I think, Nature, but that of Mr Hodgson's own intelligence, or wisdom, that in spite of the shabby tigers and dancing bears, shines blandly through to bear witness to what lies behind sometimes inadequate symbols

When they are not inadequate it is expressed with the favour and dignity of a Drydenian ode

I heard the universal choir  
The Sons of Light exalt their Sire  
With universal song  
Earth's lowliest and loudest notes  
Her million times ten million throats

Exalt him loud and long

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.           I heard the whole  
Harmonious hymn of being roll  
Up through the chapel of my soul  
And at the altar die

A poem like this that successfully translates into speech a state of illumination not only makes light of what at other times are serious obstacles (such as the rather sentimental attitude to animals, a variety of Georgian naturalism) but in overcoming such temporal accidents acquires something of that timelessness which is the mark of one kind, though not the only kind, of great poetry. It is to be regretted that his output has not been larger and his influence, despite the minor flaws referred to above, greater among the youngest of the Georgians. *The Song of Honour, Babylon*, or *The Journeyman* are, if there be such a thing, "pure poetry"; yet the two latter—such is the deplorable condition of public taste, are seldom if ever included in anthologies, instead we meet continually with the more obvious and less fortunate *Stupidity Street*, or the dancing bears.

## TRANSITION

### (a) *Edmund Blunden*

In this poet may be seen an admirable example of the 'progress of the soul' from the Georgian kitchen-garden to the macrocosm of total humanity. It was no Pauline conversion, but a natural development that carried him from

He's lost, he's won, with splash and scuffling  
Past the low-lapping brandy-flowers drawn in,  
The ogling hunchback perch with needled fin

to

or were it best  
To lie and fill my venomed breast  
With Manchinello's deadly sleep  
And run like murder down the steep?

He started brilliantly as an agricultural and pastoral poet with a steady seriousness of purpose and clear enthusiasm for his subject that made him at once compare favourably with the elder Georgians. Then, it seemed possible for them to claim that by including in their ranks one who was bringing up to date the tradition of Crabbe and John Clare,

they were establishing direct descent from the old masters of English poetry For Blunden was able to write not only of Village scenes in neat "faggoted" couplets, (Crabbe himself might have written of almswomen

All things they have in common, being so poor,  
And their one fear, Death's shadow at the door,)

but of Nature, wild or domesticated, with a richness of language had not been heard since Clare's time Such were only some of the merits the first phase of his verse, and *The Waggoner* and *The Shepherd* were rightly hailed as an example of what the Right wing could still do despite the growing notoriety and eccentricity of the Left

After the appearance, in 1925, of *English Poems*, several reviewers were evidently alarmed to discover that he was no longer wholly on the side of the angels,—if the term could be applied to amateurs of the simple bucolic lay The rapid growth of complexity in expression coincided, no doubt, with an equally rapid lengthening of the focus of vision, the shift from the village green to eternity An interesting clue to the reason for this (to some) perturbing increase of "metaphysical" content is pro-

allusions to the Classics were condemned as worse than pedantic. It was not then without courage that he struck so stout a blow for secession as to invoke the ancient gods anew, Pan for his maiden-reed, Persephone for her lost flowers (see *Old Pleasures 'Deserted'*), Dido's phantom, Apollo's bough, or the ghosts of Ida returned with new life, a new and vigorous beauty, to enrich and refresh the wastes now thinly covered with a stunted growth of "little things."

Moreover he adopts the practice, now popularised by T. S. Eliot, of literary allusion carried to and beyond the point of quotation ;

And hurrying over pages thick as leaves  
In Vallombrosa, now with surprised blush  
We met with Mary Shelley's name.

He thus dissociates himself from the false conclusion to which too many others have leapt, that poetry, to be a criticism of life, must consider (what the poet conceives to be) life in the raw, as it were, isolated from books, from myth, or from any kind of that decoration which does not simply adorn life, but is at least half of life itself. And like a sherris sack, the criticism of life lurks in and behind the fiery and delectable shapes

that express it; the shapes, the images, do not, as they do in some of the Imagist poems and earlier Sitwell verse, exist for themselves alone

Among these strong images are those that bear that hall-mark of "modernism," the transference of sensory values,—a favourite trick of Miss Sitwell's, but Blunden practises it with less of a strain, with scarcely a creak of the driving-gear. We have Lear's "hoarse unglimmering heath," "the clods roll their brown heads," "the stony sky," "one gold note," "voice as crystalline as music on the waters," "the stealth of silent lakes," "thunderous light." The process is subtler than that described in Belloc's *Cahban's Guide to Letters*, indicating significant correspondences of different senses and so increasing emotional appreciation of the object described.

*English Poems* leaves the reader with an impression that Mr Blunden's poetic Odyssey is not yet at an end; though what Laestrygonies yet remain to encounter, what Gortyns to weather, can only be ascertained in another book.

(b) *Imagism.*

It appears that the beginnings of English Imagism were as early if not earlier than the institution of Georgian poetry, or of the formation by Brooke, Abercrombie, and Drinkwater of the foundation upon which that edifice was built. F S Flint was a father of Imagism and helped to formulate the creed of that body,—then a string of pleasantly startling heresies, but now, in many of its articles, a creed outworn. The tendency of this sect was to produce little poems rather than brood over little things, which, however cunningly disguised, seems to be merely another aspect of twentieth-century shrinking from the Grand Manner. Their beliefs, sometimes arbitrary and fallacious, included a quite laudable declaration for economy in language, but, unable to let well alone, they proceeded to set the image, which is essentially brief, above the “voluminous” poem, by such literal idolatry preferring (one must deduce) H D over Virgil, and evidently postulating *a priori* that a long poem tended to be inferior to a short. Next, they eschewed without sufficient reason, language that might be called “abstract,” and it was perhaps from them that the widely-

disseminated belief sprang, that concrete terms are requisite to vividness in poetry. It is of course harder to be vivid when using 'abstractions,' while the art of the vivid image is well within the range of every intelligence. Thirdly, they banished "philosophical" or "descriptive poetry," and it is interesting to see how thoroughly Richard Aldington, ex-imagist, has broken these commandments in his long and excellent poem, *A Fool I' The Forest*, where he welcomes both back with eagerness. However, the law was obeyed at first, and images, at their best jewels, at their worst, poor essays in inadequate communication, tickled the ears of the intelligentsia, as the latest (and rather French) thing. Flint is the severest of the coterie, and like Aldington in his Imagist days, suggests to one a good poet hampered by erroneous doctrine, amongst them in general the practice will be found to be better than the precept. Strict application to the matter on hand, scrupulous rectitude in refusing to throw up a mysterious and alluring "smoke-screen" of words are their virtues, especially Flint's; but if we compare his *Swan* with Tennyson's *Dying Swan* we are forced to admit, even if we would not,



that Tennyson has the best of it, and that Flint seems to be "cutting off his nose to spite his face " Thus Flint,

O twi-shape, O triple nature,  
bird, fish and serpent,  
do you plunge your head,  
Does your beauty tire you ?

If the Victorian experience was more sentimental, (and after all the outcry against sentimentality when considered seriously, is nothing but an abortive attempt to shelve a difficult problem) it was more splendidly conveyed

her awful jubilant voice,  
With a music strange and manifold  
Flow'd forth with a carol free and bold,  
As when a mighty people rejoice  
With shawms, and with cymbals, and harps  
of gold

Both have their faults, "a carol free and bold" may be weak, but it is not so amusingly pedestrian as "does your beauty tire you ?" And "twi-shape" falls as stalely on the "post-Sitwellian" ear as "harps of gold" did, no doubt, upon the Imagist ear. Allowing for neural fashions, the modern poetry-student would probably shrink less

from the former than from the latter quotation. Similarly, in a few years we shall possibly be preferring "Break, break, break" to

Here the sea  
gnaws the long coast,  
churning the shingle  
over the beach,  
wind-driven  
whiten and topple  
over our bodies,

which even now sounds and looks distressingly jejune. Apart from this, Flint has succeeded in isolating poetry from those tripping musical rhythms which were popularly supposed (and the populace, unlike the Imagist, was unfamiliar with French *vers libre*) to be an integral part of it; and apart from submission in his own case to an unsatisfactory poetic, he is gifted with a sensible and creative critical faculty. Most of the Imagists are persons of unusual intellect and erudition. Flint specialises in modern continental literature, and was the first Englishman to write intelligently of the Dadaist movement.

The imagists were an Anglo-American body, including several civilised Americans,

such as John Gould Fletcher, who does not come within the purview here enforced, and, though not strictly an imagist, T. S. Eliot, who does; and another American, Ezra Pound. Eliot was then editor of the since defunct *Egoist*, and his assistant was a younger Imagist, Richard Aldington, who is also a critic as well as a poet on paper, did the best possible with the constricted form which he afterwards abandoned. As a writer on the War, he took the side of Siegfried Sassoon and Herbert Read; but while, as *Images of War* and subsequent work bear witness, it was a vital experience to him, it was far from blocking up the whole of his foreground. The glory that was Greece had, and has continued to keep, a prior claim, "the soft Kimmerian dusk," "the Kyprian's breasts", indeed, it seems that he is never more at home than when suckled, a neo-pagan, in this select creed

Of all the ancient songs  
 Passing to the swallow-blue halls  
 By the dark streams of Persephone  
 This only remains  
 That in the end we turn to thee  
 Death,  
 That we turn to thee, singing  
 One last song

His subsequent development will need to be reviewed hereafter, since with it we shall leave imagism behind, but before leaving him it may be noted that, together with Flint and "H D", he cultivates the handling of colour with the lapidary's cunning; it is easy to cheapen colour-words by a reckless and frequent use that deadens reaction, but these three are careful and correct in their spacing. Besides the "swallow-blue halls" may be cited these instances from Aldington

"Your body has the hot splendour of gold lands  
Laden with sunlight "

" thrilled by your gold-dark flesh ."

"The naked pale limbs of the dawn  
But from one scarlet breast I see the cloudy  
cover slowly drawn,"

—In passing I might mention that he does not confine himself even at this stage to free verse

From Flint one more quotation will further illustrate this art of coloration\*

Under the lily-shadows  
And the gold  
And the blue and mauve  
that the whin and lilac

---

\* John G Fletcher, incidentally, has written a Blue and a Green Symphony

pour down on the water  
the fishes quiver

While "H.D," with a preference for blue,  
writes

The wind sounds with this  
And the sea  
Where the rollers shot with blue  
Cut under deeper blue

She is the most artless of the three, and her outlines the softest, the concreteness and precision which is successfully executed by the other two, are mitigated, blotted, one might say, slightly but romantically, in her poems, they are the notes of the flute, which has not the pungency of those of the oboe

Ezra Pound is the chameleon of modern poetry. At one time he will with difficulty be discovered camouflaged amid the Imagists, at another to be a Sinological dreamer, now he is carolling a free-verse villanelle in the costume of an up-to-date Trouvère, or now again frowning in the sternest mood of Vorticist asceticism. This versatility has both its charms and its drawbacks, for while many have admired him as an acrobat, few today will regard him seriously as a poet.

Some years ago, Douglas Goldring, in an entertaining mock ode to the self-advertising literary tribe, referred to "Ezra's circle of performing Yanks", but in as fair a spirit as is possible to an Americophobic Briton, it must be admitted that Ezra himself is the only member of the *côterie* who truly deserves the epithet. Another light-hearted critic has called him, no less appropriately\* "a rhythmic busybody announcing himself busy". "Come my songs" cries Pound, "let us express our baser passions," and thus we find him at the old trick of attempting "*épater les bourgeois*". But the modern bourgeois are likely to withstand the shock, and if he is sometimes cheap, he is never nasty.

His Chinese pasticcios are, as one might expect, in this style —

"The phoenix are at play on their terrace,  
The phoenix are gone, the river flows on alone.  
Flowers and grass  
Cover the dark path  
Where lay the dynastic house of the Go,"

with a slightly restrained and imagistic flavour; but in his more acrobatic vein he can rise to

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\* Emmanuel Morgan.

I had over-prepared the event—  
   that much was ominous  
 with middle-aging care  
                   I had laid out just the right books,  
 I had almost turned down the right pages,

or to this —

There are in Sirmione, twenty eight young  
                   Dantes and thirty-four Catulli

In his later pose as a Vorticist he has a little  
 impressionism to offer ,

Green arsenic smeared on an egg-white cloth  
 Crushed strawberries ! Come let us feast our eyes

an experience (one would have said) scarcely  
 worth recording, and certainly not in such  
 ineffective terms On the other hand, it  
 must be remembered that English poetry  
 owes him a debt The mouse delivered the  
 lion in the fable , and Mr Pound has played  
 no inconsiderable part in loosening the bonds  
 of crabbed custom and vain repetition No  
 one would entertain for a moment the  
 amusing notion that Ezra Pound is a greater  
 poet than Robert Bridges But we come  
 away from a reading of the Poet Laureate  
 with a vague sense of having strayed out of  
 the age into a mausoleum full of dead pomps

and the perfumed dust of kings, and we feel that such poetry must endure, not by living, but by resting eternally embalmed. Whereas, though it is doubtful if Mr Pound's work will endure for long, it certainly lives intensely in its age.

In the free verse of all these poets the rhythm is said to follow closely the thought and emotion, but while it has the merit of escaping from that barbaric loudness which the intellectuals of a slightly more recent age affected to admire, it lacks as a whole anything of the grandeur which now and then dignified the elephantine calisthenics of Walt Whitman, and contains less nobility than can be found in a single sentence of Gibbon or Macaulay. For "contain," it might be safer to substitute, "gives the effect of." At all events the Imagists have recognised that man, as a thinking creature, has a right to poetry which is something more than "as natural as a bird's song," or full of "the innocence and wisdom of an Early Italian picture" (whatever that may be), to quote from an anonymous dilettante. They have saved scholarship and awareness of aesthetic problems from the wreck of latter Victorianism, if they have failed to



salvage other riches The mild sensation caused by the grafting of free verse onto an English stem seems to be passing away, and may come to be regarded one day as a curiosity like the experiments resulting from the Harvey-Immerito correspondence But it will be seen that one great poem, Eliot's *Waste Land*, is likely to remain as a monument of the style.

## “NEW PATHS”

An anthology bearing this title appeared in 1918; and here for the first time, “the old gang,” Drinkwater, De La Mare, and their satellites, found themselves in the same book with writers who then seemed as strange and tiresome as they were obscure, Aldous Huxley, Edith Sitwell, T W Earp, who, it was evident, had no intention of carrying the “bird-song” tradition any further, but, as a set-off to

I long to shape in stone  
What life has meant to me  
That my delight be known  
To all eternity

(Gibson), expressed themselves thus.—

The cows and sparkling sheep  
In shrill green painted fields  
Seem blocks of wood asleep

and thus :—

Crash and bump—my poor bruised body!  
I am a harp of twittering strings,

An elegant instrument, but infinitely second  
 hand,  
 And if I have not got phthisis it is only an  
 accident.  
 Droll phenomena

The words of Mercury were harsh after the songs of Apollo, but they clashed more bravely in the ear than did the rather elderly drone of the authentics. And for some time this brave clashing, while it exasperated the senior critics, so charmed the junior, many of whom merely sought some new thing, that they were at first inclined to welcome anything from the Left, and to damn the Right and Centre. But discrimination and the increase of competent judges soon reduced what seemed to be an exhilarating confusion to order, and it became clear that modern poetry was of many kinds, and that to call it modern was, contrary to the general belief, not to define it. The Georgians were diverse, but an attempt has been made to show that they had at least some common ground but the poets now to be considered appear to belong to several distinct genera, to link whom seems an impossible task. The term "post-Georgians" represents merely miscellaneous groups of younger poets who are

not Georgians, and should not be mistaken for a generic term

T S Eliot was excluded from "New Paths," presumably on account of his nationality\*; but since from a cultural point of view he can scarcely be called an American, and because of his importance as an "influence" in English letters, he must receive a prominent place in any survey of recent movements. Some time after the death of the *Egoist* Eliot became editor of a serious and sedately progressive quarterly, *The Criterion* (since republished as *The New Criterion*) which, ever since the winter of 1922, has purveyed the kind of wisdom and learning that is most acceptable to the rare, genuine, British "highbrow." The tone of mental efficiency which it has consistently set makes it clear that in these hard-thinking circles there is no place for the sluggard, the criticaster, or for anyone who is not prepared to devote himself strenuously and unremittingly to the theory and practice of letters. Mr Eliot, with a restlessly analytic disposition, does well as a decoy duck for

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\* Mr Conrad Aiken is excluded from this book, despite his acknowledged merit, but he has neither Mr Eliot's unique position, nor Mr Pound's notoriety

the divine hunter Phronesis, since alike in poesy and criticism he shows the same purposeful sagacity Whenever he considers "little things" he does so with the eye, not of the refugee from greatness, but of the scholar anxious to omit no detail requisite to the perfect revelation of the whole,—of the microscopist conducting scrupulously his researches ; and perhaps he is even too conscientious in the matter of detail As far back as Prufrock, there was no doubt as to his method

And indeed there will be time  
To wonder, "do I dare," and "do I dare?"  
Time to turn back and descend the stair  
With a bald spot in the middle of my hair  
(They will say "how his hair is growing thin")

A serious, sensitive, and painstaking mind can thus give the weight of a psychological event to what at first sight appears to be whimsical social satire There seems always to be something tragic, something of dismay, in his view of the world, a dismay particularly liable to be evoked at a moment in which luscious beauty is preceived,—

The nightingales are singing near  
The convent of the Sacred Heart.

And sung within the bloody wood  
 When Agamemnon cried aloud  
 And let their liquid siftings fall  
 To stain the stiff dishonoured shroud

The poem from which this is quoted, *Sweeney and the Nightingales*, seems to have made a profound impression on John J Adams and Osbert Sitwell; the disciples of Eliot are drawn from various groups, whether decorator or Vorticist. Their master is seen at once to be the organiser of an unusually responsive nervous system, of a sensitive machine that functions to a point of an exhaustion that a coarser engine could not experience, and this is the opposite of a view which the writer has heard expressed, that the Eliot type of poetry is a stimulant manufactured by the neurasthenic for his own and his readers' debile nerves,—surely a rather wild supposition. There may be suggestions of overstrain, but not of the Masfieldian overstrain attributable to the romantic pastime of pursuing the Unattainable; it arises, I might suggest, from the vast amount of labour that his conscientiously scientific mind imposes on its mechanism; there follows collapse and, inevitably, the process of self-caricature,

The young are red and pustular  
Clutching piaculative pence

and

Uncorseted, her friendly bust  
Gives promise of pneumatic bliss

Before Eliot had finally established himself as a first class power with his *Waste-Land*, he was already, almost precociously, an influence; other poets, while building more or less to their own design, used the "Sweeney" order of verse as a foundation. Sweeney gives birth to other similar conceptions —

The orange and vermilion lights  
Twinkle among the indigo trees,  
Williamson in violet tights  
Converses with the blond marquise

or again,

Mrs Freudenthal day-dreams  
(ice-spoon half way to her nose)  
Till the girl in ochre screams,  
Hits out at the girl in rose\*\*

and once again, more remotely

Atkinson has a tremendous storm of gloom  
When the lilacs come into bloom†

\* J J Adams, *Profiteer Williamson pursues Culture* (Wheels, 1920)

\*\* Osbert Sitwell, *De Luxe*

† J Nishiwaki, *A Kensington Idyll* (Chapbook, 1924).

These are but the most outward and visible signs. *The Waste Land* introduced still further features that have been adopted by the writers of subsequent poems, chief among which are allusion and elucidation by notes, and the choice of psychological themes. The necessary device of annotation was, for strange reasons, commented on adversely, whereas without it the *Waste Land*, with its labyrinth of allusions and polyglot quotations, would be scarcely intelligible to the uninitiated. In the choice of such materials Mr Eliot displays his poetic wisdom, since they are clearly fitted for the creation of dignity and the universalising of individual history. Miss Marianne Moore, with less artistic discrimination, selects, more than once, and attributes undue significance to, chips and orts of mere literary refuse. The *Waste Land* is a poem of contrasts, and antipathies between objects or situations which one may take as symbolising respectively phantasy and reality, and is charged with the tragic dismay noticed elsewhere. It might, at the first reading, appear to be a piece of sheer expressionism, but the presence of values with universally accepted standards, (e g, the game of chess episode



and the public-house bar episode) interfere with this classification. But there are recurrences of certain symbols which are as puzzling as Blake's caterpillar on the leaf, both Sweeney and the nightingales reappear, and seem to represent some mental characteristic of the poet, just in Blunden's work the image of a galloping pig recurs. The rat entering the poem at intervals awakes in the reader sinister suggestions of decay, like the dead geranium in an earlier poem, his obscene presence dismays us with its lesson of the final reality.

I think we are in rats' alley  
Where the dead men lost their bones  
and

A rat crept softly through the vegetation,  
Dragging its slimy belly on the bank  
While I was fishing in the dull canal

And bones cast in a little dry garret,  
Rattled by the rat's foot only, year to year  
This last passage is at once countered by an image of vulgar life,

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\* And through the spaces of the dark  
Midnight shakes the memory  
As a madman shakes a dead geranium.

The sound of horns and motors which shall bring  
Sweeney to Mrs Porter in the spring

Poetry of this kind has been called subjective, and is partly so, inasfar as the referring-to-the-subject attitude is increased, it might be said of Eliot's poetry in general that while he views the world from a vantage point in the world of the ego, and in the perspective so obtained, he scrutinises the view so taken "in vacuo" He succeeds in this balanced detachment and attachment when other of the "subjective" poets (e g. Edith Sitwell) do not Hitherto he has failed to be sufficiently explanatory, the use and significance of certain images apparently of the expressionist order requires comment, though in some cases the author, himself even,—or indeed, the science of psychology in its present rudimentary state, might be unable to supply it The difficulty arises largely out of placing the conscious besides the unconscious symbol, so that the layman finds it a hard task to discern the one from the other If this practice has come to stay, all poems should in future be annotated with scrupulous honesty.

Richard Aldington, quitting the narrower

paths of imagism, published in 1925 the long and distinctly *Eliotesque* poem, *A Fool I' the Forest*, the scheme of which he outlines in a preface. The "I" of the poem is "shown at a moment of crisis, and the phantasmagoria is the mirror of his mind's turmoil as he struggles to attain a harmony between himself and the exterior world." Here again is a personal problem with a general application, and a poem, consequently with ethical and possibly didactic elements. Only five years previously Mr. Monro had written, "there is still current among certain people a conception of the Poet as primarily a teacher." In the foregoing pages it has been assumed that the function of poetry is rather to delight. The pleasure-theory has had but a short innings, and here we are back to an admiration of Lucretius and Aristotle's view that poetry is a more philosophical and a more serious thing than History. The word 'didactic' had been debased by persons of Mr. Monro's kidney into a term of abuse; but Herbert Read makes a distinction between dead and living (or truly poetic) didacticism (in which he is

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\* Erik Satie observed "je n'aime pas les pontifs" but the modern didactic poet indicates, not pontificates.

perhaps a little unfair to Erasmus Darwin) and points out that moral and ethical teaching is an organic part of the poetry of Dante and Chapman \* Aldington's poem is serious and philosophical in conception, though in execution there are certain flaws, certain backslidings from satire into cheap colloquialisms (not that colloquialisms are to be banned—but it requires an Eliot to handle them) which hint at intractable but fugitive moods in which equilibrium is disturbed. One comes, unfortunately at the very beginning

“Court-jester to an age that lacks a king”

Now who said that?

Some fool who thought the crowd should  
praise his verses

Instead of punting mildly at the races?

But the beauties, mostly of a passionate order, are many; the twenty-fourth verse or “fytte” with its majestic opening slightly altered from Lord Brooke, and progressing to an ecstasy of recollection, (“every rock-cleft blossomed with narcissus, every slope with broom and vine and lemon”) is worth studying as a good example of a poet who,

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\* *Reason and Romanticism.*

still disciplined by his former imagistic phase, when he used to write

Your body is whiter than a moon-white sea  
More white than foam upon a rocky shore,

is yet so new to his emancipation, that he must sometimes revel in it with cries of

You're drunk, you bloody fool,  
Your nonsense makes me ill

allowing for the fact that these words are put into the mouth of the Personification of the enemy of beauty,—smug and brutal materialism

The symbolic figures of the Fool (Mezzetin) and The Conjuror, who stand respectively for the imaginative and the intellectual faculties, are first cousins to the Allegorical figures of mediaeval and some eighteenth century poetry, and thus another link is established with tradition; though both Eliot and Aldington, to say nothing of others, in restoring philosophy to poetry, have securely united themselves with what was best in the poetic practice of the past

*A Fool I' The Forest* ends with a coda of doubt the artist-mind, after submitting to the torment of adjustment to economic conditions,

At the office I am di'gent and punctual  
 Courteous, well-bred and much respected

is tormented on sleepless nights by memories  
 "of a life once vowed to truth and beauty"  
 which urge him relentlessly to question the  
 ultimate value of his metamorphosis. The  
 crisis, common in the lives of many, is  
 adumbrated—for volumes could scarcely  
 describe it—with force and authority, but  
 the poem leaves behind it a tannic wryness  
 as of immaturity.

From a cursory view of the progress  
 made toward the poetry of "intellectual  
 emotion" it might be gathered that a re-  
 vival of Metaphysical poetry is not distant;  
 and passing on to Herbert Read, and  
 beyond his realistic War-poetry, there will  
 be found in the *Mutations of a Phoenix* the  
 fruits of an intelligent study of 16th and  
 17th century poetry and what, accepting his  
 own definition of Metaphysical poetry as that  
 which deals with concepts, satisfies the con-  
 dition. Throughout the book there are  
 repeated allusions to the rhythmic and cyclic  
 nature of the universe; not merely in its  
 physical aspects but in the regions of  
 thought;

Mind wins decidedly  
 Hibernating through many years  
 Impulse alone is immutable sap

and it is necessary to remember that sap  
 ebbs and flows, and that the Phoenix, who  
 appears to symbolise an absolute vital and  
 spiritual principle, is burnt and reborn

The phoenix burns spiritually  
 among the fierce stars  
 and in the docile brain's recesses

Its spark out  
 and out is existence

This fiery phoenix, "bird of terrible pride",  
 is invoked as the agent of salvation, to  
 penetrate with its shrill warnings "the shut-  
 tered minds below you Inhabit our wither-  
 ed nerves" An analogous idea forms the  
 base of Campbell's *Flaming Terrapin*, though  
 the latter's conception of this mind-restoring  
 power is the less subtle of the two

The idea of the universal rhythm and of  
 the human mind's relation to it is further  
 pursued in *The Retreat*

The same rhythm  
 governs the structure of all that's seen  
 and felt and heard—of all that's known  
 in the deep percipient heart of man.

But the mind, though it may have seen "beauties beyond its reach," is liable to discord and "rebounding disharmoniously down some precipice is carried by unconscious force till death give it inertia" Humanity, out of harmony with the rhythmic spirit, may find remedy in "some state of high serenity beyond the range of febrile senses," but such a remedy may never come within its reach before it passes on—"a cynic race—to bleak ecstasies we are driven by our sombre destiny" Mr Read seems to despair when he prescribes (in the *Monologue addressed to a wandering Tyro*) something like the old Super-man nostrum

New children must be born of Gods in  
 a deathless land where the  
 Uneroded rocks bound clear from cool  
 glassy tarns, and no flaw in mind or flesh .

Mr Wells' men like gods, in fact

In two other poems in the volume the spirit of Donne is more easily perceived ; to one, *The Analysis of Love*, he has given for a motto the line from Donne's *Exstacie*, "else a great prince in prison lies" In the verse whence this comes we are told that to prevent this imprisonment, lovers' souls must descend "t' affections, and to



faculties which sense may reach and apprehend." Read, continuing where Donne leaves off, considers further the relations of mind, love, and lust This last is finite ,

Lust gone, other elements exist  
wrought in the body's being

But love as a whole is in itself of doubtful value A mind "emotion-bound" is impeded in its "conquest of brutal foes," if (and Read seems to doubt this) it truly conquers Reason fights vainly "to dam some bank against the giant flood of this emotion " Love, then, is likely to become merely another element of strife and discord,—and to what end is this strife? The poem ends with a pessimistic answer ,

This mental ecstasy all spent  
In disuniting death

Donne's spirit is present, but not by any means entirely , Donne is a veritable Golconda of verbal wealth, Read "a dark desert all around " To such lengths of austerity does he go that his thoughts, while they are perceived to be highly important, suffer in the expression, which is sometimes plainly inadequate One feels with regret,

almost with annoyance, that he might have made so much more of his ideas. There is decoration which is not extraneous, not merely applied to fill unintended blanks, but a necessary member of the living whole. Such were the flowers of the old metaphysical garden. The exception is *John Donne declines a Benefice*, where possibly unconscious emulation or sheer force of example has roused the sense of metaphor and simile —

As Ethiops engendered under a lusty sun  
 Like Mahmed in his shroud and leaden sheet  
 To dissolve in its dark motionless vat  
 The heart's stony clot  
 of fast fermented flesh

Mr. Read also keeps a characteristic "seal" or image, which is geological; in the *Monologue* we see "uneroded rocks," in the *Analysis of Love*, "waves and winds erosion," and in the *Lament of Saint Denis*, a later poem, "riven rocks, eroded plains."

An attempt at philosophical poetic drama should be mentioned in passing. Mr. John Middleton Murry set out gracefully for this goal in writing *Cinnamon and Angelica*, which is certainly an improvement on the merely preaching method of the prose dramatists of

the last generation, but Mr Murry, after some years' dalliance with philosophy has chosen the wider road of religion, proving what has been already suspected, that his mental persistence is insufficient to fulfil the original aspiration

A younger free-lance in the philosophic field, connected neither with the *Egoist* nor the *Criterion*, is Roy Campbell, an allegorist rather than a symbolist, whose *Flaming Terrapin*\* brought him into sudden prominence. The Terrapin is, theriomorphosed, the soul or vital principle of the world, and the poem might be called an epic of the workings and adventures of this force,

The sudden strength that catches up men's souls  
And rears them up like giants to the sky

From these two lines alone it can be seen that the Terrapin promises to be more exuberant than Mr Read's phoenix, though it will not necessarily prevail over it, for that, as an artistic creation

"Bearing whole islands on its stormy back" this creature, born of the earth, leaps upward through the ocean and greets the sun while

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\* Jonathan Cape, 1924

Perched on the stars around h'm in the air  
 White angels rinsed the moonlight from their  
 hair

White angels sitting on stars are surprisingly introduced from the stratum of the Christmas card and the Parish Magazine, new vigour and significance being instilled into what, three or four years earlier, was regarded as merely banal. It may be assumed that they appeared in this poem by design, though the "humour" of his Muse is impetuous rather than laborious, he assaults with courage which can only be called boisterous, the formidable stronghold of Allegory. After the terrapin we are introduced to Noah, the cunning builder and navigator, who stands for intelligence directing the primal urge. Under his steersmanship the terrapin tows the ark round the world at a tremendous rate.

Round the stark Horn, the lupanar of Death  
 Where she and that fierce Lesbian, the Typhoon,  
 Roll smoking in the blizzard's frosty breath,  
 While like a skinny cockroach, the faint moon  
 Crawls on their tattered blanket

He makes the best of his well stored vocabulary and his thesaurus of images and conceits, sea-currents are queens in silver

skirts that make a "great frou-frou," and grey baboons are "gaunt muezzins of the mountain-tops", nor does the excitement wane at any moment in the poem of ninety-four pages. After the ark episode is completed, the terrapin is made to undertake other labours on behalf of humanity, the devil, author of all that is mean, enervated, and corrupt, is next attacked, the onslaught providing an opportunity for a long simile in the Homeric manner,

As a fierce train, maned like a ramping lion  
With smoke and fire, thunders on rolling iron

and so forth. But the children of the devil, described elsewhere are, without disguise, the Personified Abstracts of the old Interludes, and later didactic poems—beings that had been banished more than a century ago by Romantic revivalists. They return, gigantic spectres that loom through the driven fires and howling tempests of Mr Campbell's imagination; Anarchy lashing his gusty stallion, and those children of the fiend "who whores with nature"—"Foul Mediocrity," "Old Plutocracy on Gouty feet," "Patriotism, Satan's angry son," and "Pale Corruption." They are the afflictions and night

mares of suffering man, from which the terrapin is to deliver them, but meanwhile

We lie in graves and dungeons, but our chams  
Are naught but our own sluggard nerves and veins

Rebirth, however, is not confined to the human race but extends throughout Nature :

#### Old Earth

Writhes in the anguish of a second birth,  
And now casts off her shrivelled hide to be  
The sun's fair bride, as bright and pure as he

He leaps, and as she yields her golden thigh  
Gigantic copulations shake the sky

The terrapin, his task accomplished, dis-  
carnates himself, but the human mind  
remains, envigoured, as his emanation, "the  
dreamer that remains, the Man, clear-cut  
against the last horizon " If the method is  
unsubtle and the texture coarse, the spirit  
and *élan* make almost ample amends

The metre is worth studying, and not  
solely for its variety, which ranges from the  
eighteenth century five-stress iambic, with  
correct middle caesura.—

While lousy toucans	clanking hollow bills
Sounded him on	as he bestrode the hills

to "jazz" rhythms worthy of Vachel Lindsay

And the sun-dappled herds, a skipping to the  
sing go

Kicking up the dust on the great grey plains  
Tsessebe, Koodoo, Buffalo, Bongo

With the fierce wind leaping in their manes.

The energy, despite the discipline of the couplet in places, is not quite native to England, and if the metre suggests Lindsay, the whole manner sets him nearer to the enthusiasms of Herman Melville and Whitman than to the speculations of Herbert Read. The very couplets seem to abjure their customary decorum, and to acquire a tempestuous motion. Boileau, had he read them, would have dismissed them, no doubt, as "monstrous verses," and even Dryden, innovator as he was, might have required this young poet to "retrench the superfluities of expression." No such advice would need to be proffered to Aldous Huxley, whose first publication, *The Burning Wheel*, was distinguished by a precocious maturity of thought and language,—at least, when it was compared with volumes by poets of a like age, in the same series ("Adventurers All"). It contains of course, as all first volumes must, things which the author now probably

regrets ; it cannot be quite pleasant to have to look back upon

Eager I knelt before the waning fire,  
Phoenix, to greet thine immortality  
But there was naught but ashes at the last,

but others have had to recollect far worse lapses Taking it as a whole it is the book of one who is destined to be a "tough-minded" poet, as William James no doubt would have called him, in opposition to the "tender-minded" poets of the Drinkwater or Gibson type It was not long before he had made himself at home in a mental condition or attitude in which he was to sojourn for some time, and which might be called a "misocosmic" rather than a misanthropic view Early explorations in the new region resulted in that kind of art that earned for him the title of "the *enfant terrible* of modern literature" in, as far as I recollect, the Times Literary Supplement The following examples will support the allegation :—

- (a) If, O My Lesbia, I should commit  
Not fornication, dear, but suicide  
My Thames-blown body (Pliny vouches it)  
Would drift, face upward, on the oily tide  
With the other garbage, till it putrefied



- (b) A million million spermatozoa  
All of them alive,  
Out of their cataclysm but one poor Noah  
Dare hope to survive
- (c) God's in his heaven, he never issues  
(Wise man!) to visit this world of ours  
Unchecked the cancer gnaws our tissues  
Stops to lick chops and then again devours

Though the public were duly shocked, to shock was not, if one may judge from his work as a whole, his primary intent, but to invite attention, in all seriousness, to certain grave shortcomings in the universal order. *Leda*, a longer poem, carries out a theory of representationalism which he sketches in *Chrome yellow*, one of his novels. Here we are given 'objective beauty, or beauty in detachment, in clear-cut run-on couplets, and with almost perfect sharpness of outline. It is one of the more "tangible" poems of the English language, and, at the time at which it was written cut right across the free-verse, obscurantist, and expressionistic tendencies, for which it served as a wholesome discipline. It may have shocked the reactionary groups, but it must surely have perturbed those who believed themselves to be in the vanguard of poetry and who were complacently writing this kind of thing:—

Aldous Huxley was one of the most conspicuous contributors to "Wheels," an anthology which, after the appearance of its first volume in 1916, was considered to be sensational, and misled unwary critics into labelling it "precious," "macabre," or "Baudelairian." Other language, as violent as void, was lavished in exclaiming at a phenomenon that was more natural than portentous. The Editor of *Wheels*, Miss Edith Sitwell, became quite famous for the manner in which she entirely redecorated the temple of the Muses. Her peculiar art is 'hard-minded,' if Huxley's is 'tough-minded,' and expresses itself in terms of brightly painted wood, balloons, crinoline, and gilt wire. The fauna will include parrots and clockwork nightingales; the sun is a ripe apricot, the sky hairy, the sea made of silk, or of parrot-feathers. There is something in this feverishly intense three-dimensionality of what she happily terms "the higher sensualism." The effect is heightened by the very marked rhythms, sometimes of octosyllables, sometimes of liting or skipping forms borrowed from popular music, a cavatina, a hornpipe, or this, adapted to the strains of the harmonica;

their eyes like wrinkled tortoises'  
 And their hair's black vortices  
 Whirl as they sank upon one knee  
 For when they saw  
 My mother-in-law  
 They decided not to tackle me.

At first the exterior beauties were alone  
 provocative to the receptive mind, but as  
 Miss Sitwell waxed mightier in thought,  
 speculations, cries of doubt and dismay,  
 began to assail our inward ear, "for now  
 so changed was she by heavy woe" that  
 the gaudy decoration became a masque for  
 the gloom of disillusion and "intimations of  
 mortality" The change of spirit is clear in  
 the long allegorical poem, *The Sleeping Beauty*,  
 published in 1924, a date that puts it in  
 relation to T S Eliot's *Waste Land* The  
 bogey of age and decay must be envisaged;  
 and to Miss Sitwell, at least, he appears to be  
 alarmingly ill-favoured He casts a spell of  
 dullness over the world, for, though it

has the same bright-coloured clarity we knew  
 In nursery afternoons so long ago,  
 Bright as our childish dreams we are old,  
 This is a different world, the snow lies cold  
 Upon our hearts, though Midsummer is here

So the old French nursery tale is converted

into a *danse macabre*, and the wicked fay,  
mopping and mowing

in her wide-hooped petticoat, her waterflowing  
Brightly perfumed silks

is a symbol of Time, who enfeeblees our metabolism and blunts our senses, covering us gradually with "sleep, as dark as the shade of a tree", and it seems fitting that Time should select, in uttering these words, so unoriginal a simile. The gardener seems to stand for that condition of the soul in which, shrinking from the reality of the darkening through age of the material world, it retires for comfort to the caverns of its own fantasy. The gardener has learnt to meddle no longer with external adventures that lead merely to anguish, and bitterly recites his lesson between the cadences of his bagpipe.

The gardener plays his old bagpipe

The music swoons with a sad sound

"And oh, far best," the gardener said  
"Like fruits to lie in your kind bed,  
To sleep as snug as in the grave  
nor ever sigh for a strange land  
And songs no heart can understand.

The baffling spell of sleep is pronounced, a climacteric exile from "the strange land"; "age has brought a little subtle change," but the slumberers in the enchanted palace, are not even now to be left at peace Youth is eternal; as it leaves one generation, it is transferred to the next It lives in cruel triumph and changelessness. So live the 'revellers of Midsummer Fair', who disturb the drowsy household of the Princess, with memories of the joys and alertnesses of youth, but "their love is young for ever"

Their music, bright-flung as an angel's hair  
 Yet awful as the ultimate despair  
 Of angels or of devils something dreams  
 Within the sound  
 Like some ventriloquist's painted show  
 On green grass shrill as anger, dulled as hate,  
 It shrieks to the dull soul, "too late! Too late!"

It is easily the most ornate of the long psychological poems which, as may be seen, are a feature of this little intellectual renaissance; and Sitwellisms of the most polychromatic sort are in abundance the shutters "like blue water fall" "the candle-lights seem orange-flowers whose pale light falls in perfumed showers," ('perfumed' recurs too often); there are "noises like a painted

puppet-show," and "the purring fire has a bear's dull fur" At the same time the excessive repetition of some words and the lapses into atonic cliché ("shun the wave," "ripening like summer fruits") may very well indicate moments of nervous fatigue, but might have been corrected afterwards in tranquillity Both she and Aldous Huxley are students of more or less recent French poetry, though both are far from being imitators and plagiarists Laforgue, Aragon, and possibly Cocteau have had some effect on Huxley, and Verlaine, at least, had induced a poetic current in Miss Sitwell\* Her "il dottore" culling his simples is a close relation of him about whom Verlaine writes —

Cependant l'excellent docteur  
 Bolonais cueille avec lenteur  
 des simples parmi l'herbe brune

The verse of Osbert Sitwell might have written by an up-to-date and more indignant reincarnation of Praed—or at any rate, a good part of it Peering more casually than his sister at the world through his optic

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\* Also Mallarmé, and perhaps Rimbaud Freud's influence is not uncommon among the poets of *Wheels* or the *Criterion*.

glass, he finds it less surprising, but foolish and sometimes knavish, and pounces on the follies and knaveries with delight rather than with astonishment. Keener as a satirist than as a lyric poet, his method is not that of the savage Swift or the coldly irate Pope, but is of the playful order, and comparable, if to any, to that of the Cartoonist "Poy." Both bring the character who is to be fustigated onto the stage, and proceed to make him give himself away ridiculously but in all good faith. His exposition of it is not very subtle, but now and then provokes the expected smile. In the *Winstonberg Line*, Mr Winston Churchill is made to take us into his confidence; he says

I consider  
That getting killed  
Should be the normal occupation  
Of other people

and again

When Koltchak  
Murders and mutilates  
His enemies  
It is justice pure and simple;  
Whereas we all know  
That the Bolsheviks  
Commit atrocities

The tale of Mrs Kinfot, who was not allowed to go to Hell, is cleverer, it is the *reductio ad absurdum* of the consequences of the snobbishness of a "society leader" His debt to Eliot has been already mentioned, but the apparent debt to his sister can hardly be overlooked This is obvious in certain tricks that may be met with, e g , in *Church Parade*

The breath of wind would ever dare  
To make the trees' plump branches sway  
Whose thick green leaves hang down to pray

In the same poem are to be found, a terrace that "glitters hard and white," and "beds of blossoms china-bright" In *De Luxe* occur two lines that bear unmistakably the stamp of Miss Sitwell's genius

Their clock-work songs of calf-love  
Stout birds stop to recite

The simile which follows, is, however more characteristic of him.—

The ocean on a toy shore  
Yaps like a Pekinese

and the whole of his Mexican Song is as near as anything he has produced to a distinctive idiom, robust and fluid at the



same time, but even so he is more successful as a light satirist and as a prose-writer. Mr Aldous Huxley\* mentions somewhere the new aesthetic value called "The Amusing" which, he declares, has supplanted, among certain sections of English 'intellectuals,' the Sublime and the Beautiful Osbert Sitwell cultivates the Amusing with conspicuous success, and elevates it to a fine art, but Sacheverell Sitwell, third person of the trinity, follows the Beautiful with laudable steadfastness The pursuit of the wayward goddess leads him sometimes over the boundaries of affections and senses, and of common intellect, into that Platonic region where experience seems to be of both and yet of neither As early as 1917 it was plain that he possessed already the rare gifts of inspired ingenuity and richness in associated ideas These lines about the sea, which it may be interesting to compare with a previously quoted excerpt from Flint on the same subject, will illustrate his use of both talents

Each wave a hoary head  
Nigh tumbling from its long bent body

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\* and Mr W Lewis

Each head with hair blown by my mouthpiece  
 The lean, hard fingered wind,  
 Grown old because its thirsty hands  
 Can never span a shape whose bulk  
 Will stop and give it nourishment

Here is something well removed from the more facile art of Miss Sitwell. An indolent and malicious critic might have quoted Sam Weller's remarks on the oratorical powers of Mr Nupkins, in this connexion; "(the ideas) comes a-pouring out, knocking each other's heads so fast that you hardly knows what he's arter". But this would be unfair, since the ideas, while they come 'a-pouring' out, preserve the order required for the design.

In the *Hundred and One Harlequins*\* there is every sign of progress and of increased confidence; it is strong in vision, that must not however, be confused with the trance of emotional self-hypnotism, but is the reward of an unrelaxing intellectual struggle to solve chains of those problems which symbolic images and associative conceits, and the spirit to become incarnate in them, present.

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\* Grant Richards, 1922

From terraces of all the shaking fields of leaves  
 The frail ladders  
 On which our meaning climbs  
 Span the blue air  
 Until they touch the sodden ground.

Sacheverell Sitwell weaves, laboriously and also, I think, luckily, these daedal webs From the influence of Diaghileff's Russian Ballet (which, when it was in vogue, affected the work of all three Sitwells, and confirmed their pleasure in Oiseaux de Feu, Harlequins, Pierrots, and gaudy wooden toys,) he springs like one of his own Harlequins to steal a notion from Mozart, Peele, Rabelais, South Italian Baroque, or Dean Donne, and to astound us with ceaseless agility

For in shy boats that float like birds  
 the satyrs once set out again  
 to find the fleece of golden herds  
 now feeding in the woods to flout

To illustrate such poetry an artist would be required who was both Tiepolo and William Blake: as the former he could render the light-effect of "the fountains with their crystal whips thrashing the teetotum dust" and as the latter the "wise man of the south" who "sang before the dragon's mouth."

Rhyme, in the *Thirteenth Caesar*,\* retires before the main body of free verse, though a few rhymed verses linger, as it were points of colour that punctuate with a view to balance the larger masses of the composition. The free verse, that fragile and dangerously elusive medium, is handled with the care of one who has knowledge<sup>1</sup> of the movement and values of words, the rhythm is really bent to the mood, of which it so largely partakes as to heighten the reader's faculty of recognition, and thus to facilitate for him the task of reconstructing the creative act. The fact that it sings and that by the loss of a single tone it would be the further from perfection warns us not to be dogmatic about the separation of music from lyrical or other poetry even at this stage.

The mere act of talking blew those ashes  
 in our faces,  
 There was only dust left of him  
 For a pillar to his memory,  
 But this column on the wind hung still  
 for a moment  
 As though the winds held back from it and  
 would not wave their wings, .

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\* Grant Richards, 1924

<sup>1</sup> Sense knowledge+acquired knowledge.

The passage begins with a conversational colloquialism, but the whole of it is melodious; and yet the colloquial question put by F S Flint in an extract quoted above, sounded so bathetically droll ("does your beauty tire you?") that all the surrounding region was devastated by it. Flint's question brings with it, of course, associations with advertisements of the kind that begin, "do your Corns hurt you?" But even setting this aside, Sitwell's colloquialism is the more happily chosen, as no doubt, anyone who was unacquainted with the advertisement-association would admit.

Through the organ-pipes of *The Thirteenth Caesar* blow winds from every quarter of the Renaissance, nearly every point, indeed, that the card can mark between Mantuan and Longhi. Lyly, Pope, Marlowe, or Inigo Jones, supply hints for this richly coloured but not garish fabric. It was at this stage that his first prose work, *Southern Baroque Art*, which will be mentioned later on, was composed.

Among others whose verse appeared in *Wheels* were three women, Helen Rootham, Nancy Cunard, and Iris Tree. Miss Rootham is an amateur of foreign literature, and has

rendered tactfully into prose-poetry some poems of Rimbaud. The war elicited from her some comments on the tragedy of early death, and of other subjects she writes "thoughtfully" but the thought seems to be incompletely assimilated, and vague exclamations, such as "O bliss beyond imagining," or "oh pulse of my life, cling more closely to me" are apt to replace a more curious exegesis. Miss Cunard's contribution does not call for much argument; a line of hers, of no great merit, "I sometimes think that all our thoughts are wheels," gave the title to the anthology\*. Miss Tree has more claim to her laurels, but in the dust and strife of the stadium she is put into too great a hurry to impress punters as a prime favourite which she proceeds to do as follows —

Mouth of the dust I kiss, corruption absolute,  
Worm, that shall come at last to be my paramour  
and so forth until the close, "You, flabby,  
boneless, brainless, senseless, soulless"  
World-weariness linked with despair at the  
prospect of the ultimate Nothing preoccupy

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\* Her *Parallax* (Hogarth Press 1925) is, to a substantial extent, a model of allegiance to Mr Eliot

her, suggesting youth, "there is a purpose in heaven," she ejaculates, "but for me nothing." She revels in the gloom of the world's twilight, wherein a degenerate race is born:

Our lives are spoilt by introspective guile,  
We vivisect our souls with elaborate tools,  
We dance in couples to the tune of fools,

she informs us in her naive, rather unadorned manner.

Two "War Poets," one of whom, had he been spared, would probably have done work among the best of the present epoch, were also included, this one, Wilfred Owen, invented strange but moving discords, admirably suited to the unfolding of nightmare views of war.

On dithering feet upgathered, more and more,  
Brown strings towards strings of grey, with  
bristling spines

Those that were grey, of more abundant spawns.  
Ramped on the rest and ate them and were  
eaten

a history, one would say, not of men, but of vermin. He may, at first contact, arouse in us the expectation of a second Siegfried

Sassoon, especially when we read

I mind as 'ow the night afore that show  
Us five got talking

But we are soon undeceived, when we encounter the violent monstrosities and almost perverse concentration on horror, unalleviated by pitifulness or the purgation of tragedy; "eyeballs, huge-bulged like squids watch my dreams still" "the shrill demented choirs of wailing shells" In spirit he approaches the position of stability between the seen and the fantasmal worlds that a sane Méryon might have occupied The opening lines of his best-known poem which he left unfinished (*Strange Meeting*) afford a good instance of this intellectual eeriness;

It seemed that out of the battle I escaped  
Down some profound dull tunnel, long since  
scooped  
Through granites which Titanic wars had  
groined  
Yet also there encumbered sleepers groaned,  
Too fast in thought or death to be bestirred

This is remote from the droppings of warm tears of Sassoon, remote in some sense, from humanity. His early death resulted in



but a small poetic legacy; yet the value even of this has substantially enriched our literature (*Poems*, Chatto & Windus) Wyndham Tennant keeps nearer to the beaten track of war poetry, and will not be found venturing into these perilous spaces of outer darkness. The contrast of the wreckage of the battlefield with England's green and pleasant land occupies him in the poem *Home Thoughts in Laventie*, which, one cannot help feeling, is even more suitable for *Georgian Poetry* than for *Wheels*, but this is not of course, in any sense derogatory, and the fact that there is nothing bizarre or "expressionist" or "modern" in it does not in any way indicate inferiority,—to adopt such a criterion would be ridiculous. The hand of Rupert Brooke may be seen vicariously gesticulating in this stanza —

I saw green banks of daffodil,  
 Slim poplars in the breeze,  
 Great tan-brown hares in gusty March  
 A-courting on the leas,  
 And Meadows with their glittering streams,  
 and silver scurrying dace,  
 Home     what a perfect place.

*The Mad Soldier*, again, may be reminiscent of Sassoon, but it cannot be damned for a

plagiarism, the element called "Wyndham Tennant" which would have become so much stronger had he been permitted to live is unmistakably present in the metric agility and the more "interiorised" treatment of the subject

Can't you see

When the flare goes up? Ssh! boys, what's  
noise?

Do you know what these rats eat? Body-meat!

It is to be regretted that Mr John J. Adams has hitherto published nothing beyond one or two brief lyrics, and that those are still too strongly flavoured with the "Eliotesque" to disclose the author's individuality, slave to no sect, and carrying out more conscientiously than Pound the precepts of the Vorticists. As it is, the printed page can testify only to this much of emancipation —

You were saying?—"considered as an anodyne,"

Brandy has qualities not found in wine —

If I am an intellectual, then I am an intellectual.

I can't help it, can I?

Anyhow, what does it matter? the world will  
go round just the same

It is just a silly game Life gets flatter and  
flatter

. ....

and the remainder of the poem (*Café Confidences*)\*

Paul Selver is something of a humorous Timon, growling disapprobation from a Bohemian cave, but he manages to tune his cynic bark to one of the lighter modes, and neither in prose nor verse does his satiric testiness approach the ferocity of *saeva indignatio*, he would, one feels, prefer Horace to Juvenal. He revives with some facetiousness the old French forms, the Rondel, the Ballade, or the Villanelle, the Triolet, which is

like a cat  
That seeks its tail with fruitless prowling,  
You wonder what the beast is at

Much of the verse of *Personalities* (Allen and Unwin) is merely trivial, some funny, and a small proportion witty, while the whole convinces one that the Messiah of modern satire is yet to come.

The Hogarth Press is an efficient engine working in the cause of artistic progress and producing, under the management of Leonard and Virginia Woolf some valuable additions to the corpus of poetry and criticism. It was

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\* cf. also "Café Cannibale" in *The Tyro*.

from this house that Herbert Read's *Mutations of the Phoenix* issued, and more recently two new poets have been launched thence, one of whom, (George Rylands), illustrates several tendencies and influences of the younger generation, for which, together with his own merits, he is worth studying. It is obvious that he lives in an age inaugurated by Eliot, Miss Sitwell, and Herbert Read,—an age too, that turns back with understanding to link itself with Jacobean and Elizabethan lyric. The quotation-allusive method is again put into practice; and we have not read a dozen lines of his *Russet and Taffeta*,\* before we come across a small loan from Shakespeare's 33rd Sonnet, as we are told of the tinselled figures that

beheld the sun  
Flatter the London roofs with sovereign eye  
Gilding pale cheeks with heavenly alchemy

A rough parallel might be drawn between the passage beginning "You gave me hyacinths a year ago" from *The Waste Land* and Rylands' "each day I carried roses to your chamber," but the derivation of

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\* cf. *Love's Labour's Lost*, Act V Sc II, "Taffeta phrases russet yeas, "

“transposed” images like “tides of sea-green air,” white and scarlet odours,” or the Sitwellian “tinselled figures with languid gaze,” is plainly seen. Other cadences and conceits suggest Read, but not his labour, nor his embarrassment with the riches of complex experience striving to express itself through an austere reduced vocabulary. The music of the section beginning “I cannot draw clear water from the well of memory—The depths are muddied,” is not unlike some of that which we find so enjoyable in the *Phoenix*. *Russet and Taffeta* is a straightforward love-poem, a rarity in these speculative times of abstraction, and a good example of how the love theme “pans out” in modern conditions. The comparisons and antitheses which with Eliot or Aldington were applied to more general problems are used here to elucidate the personal feelings of the lover things accomplished in the glamorous past, and things unattainable in the barren present, summer and winter, London and the country. Lastly, the inversion, “rust gnaws the gate like pain at the heart” is significant of the newer attitude; the “antique” naturalist-realist would have written “pain gnaws

the heart like rust on the gate ”

✓ It is noticeable that, whereas at first the secessionists turned away with the something of alarm from those physical aspects of Nature, the woods or primroses which had been celebrated *ad nauseam* and with gradually increasing feebleness by the minors of the Georgian schools, there has been latterly a return, cautious, decorous, and thoughtful, to many of the very articles of poetic commerce that were formerly avoided, just as artists may be seen stealing back to representationalism and “literary” painting. Returning, they seem to have brought with them the good intention—not always carried out—, of imparting a deeper significance to natural objects, or of making them, as Blunden does in his *English Poems*, the symbolic vehicles of thought and feeling. But theirs are not the naive voices of the simple song-birds, nor melodies to be taken at face value. Mr. Davies had sung

Leafy with little clouds, the sky  
Is shining clear and bright  
How the grass shines—it stains the air  
Green over its own height !

But in this,

The grass sleeps goldenly, woodland and distant  
hill

Shine through the gauzy air in a dust of golden  
pollen,

And even the glittering leaves are almost still,

Aldous Huxley brings forward a great deal more of artifice, and we recall the gauziness of the air in theatre scenery, even while we recognise the appropriateness of the term when applied to the brumous atmosphere of England. Mr Barrington Gates, whose *Poems* were published by the Hogarth Press in 1825, walks through the country in a metaphysic mood. The sands of the sea-shore remind him of the Dragon Doubt, who is

Subject to time's indifferent tides, which through  
My craggy coasts of fear and shame and lust  
Go stealthily, pounding to trickles of beautiful  
dust

An odorous garden suggests "a spice of nameless fragrance" that steals "through the spirit forlorn", a tree, his "tree of thought," once green and burgeoning, now "pillared strong and bare/Against the clouds of heaven." Once more we are referred to the seventeenth century, to find Henry

Vaughan treating after this manner *The Starre* or *The Palm-Tree*,\* which latter was emblematic of "the patience of the saints, this tree is water'd by their tears" Similarly Mr Gates, in a high wind, sees his thoughts as "mocking straws that leap, crazed with bright air" Interspersed between these intriguing pieces are others of less worth, some indeed, that detract from the excellence of the book as a whole To this inferior order belong "Train Journey," a description of the disgust experienced by upper class travellers at the entry of the rustic Grandfather Gaffyn into their compartment, and *The Engineer* who observes, in a convenient five-foot iambic line "A nutty stunt of mine. See how it goes?", while the namby-pamby tone of the poems about children comes as an unpleasant surprise after *The Rock Basin*, or *The Bird* If these unfortunate verses represent a bold reclamation of those "little things" that the first Post-Georgians rejected, it can only be said that they have received no significance of any value,—that the lines

Who's for a ride on  
Prince's white back

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\* To be found in his *Silex Scintillans*



Clipperty-clopperty  
Up lane and back

have no secret either deep or delicious to impart to us. It is not necessary to be fastidious in order to insist on unity of spirit in a book—a fourth Unity, as it were. The construction of the book demands as much care as the architecture of any single poem it contains.

Mr Edwin Muir is yet another "Hogarth" poet,\* who made his *début* as one of the latter-day metaphysicals, at the end of 1925. While less astricted than Read in his diction, it is clear that he is still at the phase in which the vision struggles too obviously for adequate utterance. Thought is with him ardent in its vitality and strives all the harder for incarnation in the word,

All shape was matter, working blind,  
Appearance was stern flesh and blood  
If evil was there, then behind  
Evil the universes stood,

As, ever unremoveable,  
Behind all beauty, Beauty lay,

In writing poetry of so condensed a nature, the omission of words not absolutely neces-

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\* *First Poems*

sary and the inclusion of "telling" words only is of prime importance, and though Mr Muir's poetry suggests, infinitely more than Roy Campbell's, the practice of forge and file, the selective process, (which may involve a cruel treatment of one's own creation), is not yet fully carried out. Both Muir and Herbert Read eschew the ornament in detail which is one of Miss Sitwell's major graces, and in this (as well as in other points) they differ from her as much as Milton with his effective generalisations differs from Lyly

And spawn of earth, in waning light  
Arose far off from gulfs of fright,  
Encircling all the plain, the crests  
Of small round hills like angry breasts

But he is a "Post-Sitwellian." Such phrases as "gulfs of fright," "angry breasts," "braided paths," are of course instances of the transposition employed by every poet of the time who works to isolate poetry from moribund and misleading associations—who 'dehumanises' it, in short, to borrow a word from a contemporary. There is no danger of overdoing this process, as far as can now be seen, but there is a danger of insufficient exteriorisation, the result of which is obscurity.

—the kind of obscurity which is not the reader's fault. It is not merely unfair thus to camouflage complex thought—or any thought—it is bad art. The nature of such a poem as *The Coward*, whence the second quotation is taken, lends itself to closely veiled speech, but that this is unnecessary is proved by the luminous excellence of the last verse.

The drift towards metaphysical poetry is perhaps the most noticeable of all the post-Georgian movements, but it does not appear, as yet, to be carrying many poets with it, the rank and file, whether in London or the provinces, are still adhering, and quite possibly will continue to adhere, to the Georgian view and technique. Here and there, it is true, one may chance on a piece of work in the more complex manner, unexpectedly while reconnoitring the re-entrants of minor verse. A. L. Morton rather awkwardly attempts the thing —

“A heap of broken images, where the sun beats,  
And the dead tree gives no shelter ”

My mind is over-run with things I see  
Would make them symbols \*

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\* from *The Decachord*, a poetry magazine, published at Exeter

But one is far more likely to meet with lyric  
of this unpretentious kind,

All day until the sun's decline  
You whipped the skimming brook,  
Unweariedly you cast your line  
Yet ne'er a fish you took (J A Bramley\*)

Neither of these extracts are quoted for their poetic merit, but to show the effect of the influences as they descend from serener spheres

*A note on Religious Poetry.*

Since the neo-Catholics, Francis Thompson, Viola Meynell, Francis Meynell, and others of the same persuasion, (not excluding Belloc and Chesterton) have ceased to count for much in the turbulent forum of modern poetry, but few fresh champions of piety have appeared. At Oxford, damp cradle of Tractarianism, the grim wolf with privy paw would yearly devour a few young men and women, a few of whom temporarily, and fewer, perhaps permanently, dropped into verse and the Romish faith. A scrutiny of the heterogeneous anthology *Oxford Poetry* will reveal them at rare intervals among the

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\* See Note Opposite

lyricists of passion and romance. Wilfred Childe led the little band who made songs of Syon—for so it would be spelt in defiance of the protestant orthography, “Zion” He addresses The Great Queen of the Middle Ages as “Mistress and mother of all lovely things,” and Mr Belloc as “thou that from vast Margeride did'st see ...the eternal light on ageless Rome” For some time he so journeyed in a model and semi-terrestrial middle age, a series of landscapes by the Master E S, or by Schongauer, with little cities, clean, gilded, and bristling with spires “to Gothic fancy fair”

In Shipscar over the wold the rivers run brown  
as beer,  
And the women are not cold, and the babes are  
darling and dear  
The churches are white with praying, and the  
priests wear copes of gold,  
And the princes go clad in scarlet, fold upon  
splendid fold,  
And the youths have hair like daffodil in Shipscar  
over the wold

In this condition of sensuous and mystical excitement he repeats the intense colours of Gothic glass with a fidelity and understanding that was scarcely reached by the stouter-

nerved William Morris, and was certainly not vouchsafed to Messrs Clayton and Bell. But the delicate vortex of individuality is dispersed whenever he wanders away from his cusped citadel, to become a general utility romantic or a disciple of Yeats, exclaiming "all day long the waves wander and the winds cry."

Eric Shepherd is not permitted by his strict ultramontaniam to rove far away from the fold. His accents, musical as those of all who have followed that golden-mouthed inventor of harmonies, Francis Thompson, are less honied, less dreamily ecstatic, than Childe's. He will point us a moral with the gravity of a Scottish divine.

Continence is meet,  
But stern and full of fear,  
And innocence is sweet,  
And short and lost and dear

But the severity of dogma is tempered with an Early Florentine *décor*, "strange, elfin pink, and white, and blue, and amethyst" which is the most attractive feature of his *Blue Communion*.

In Mary's month, in Mary's month,  
When the petals whitest blow,

Because our Queen and Mother  
Doth chiefly loth them so

The Sensational in devotional poetry is attempted by Miss Dorothy Sayers, whose *Catholic Tales* created quite a little flutter, amongst those who had leisure to turn to them amidst the hubbub of international strife in (as the colophon page of the book has it) "the year of our Lord Jesus Christ MDCCCXVIII" Her attitude towards God, inspired, one suspects, by one or two of Belloc's religious lyrical trifles, is the Daringly Playful

And when we say goodnight, and You kiss me  
on the landing,  
Will you promise faithfully and make a solemn  
tryst  
You'll be just at hand if wanted, close by here  
where we are standing,  
And be down in time for breakfast, big brother  
Christ?

There is much talk of Yggdrasil, of Rhiannon, of Saba, and such pretty names, from which this deft poetess weaves garlands for the bower of Christolatry This little paradise is indeed far removed from Eliot's Inferno of mental strife or from that roaring void where Terrapin and seraphim continually do

cry their gospels to Mr. Roy Campbell

Gerald Crow, another Oxford Poet, has a neat ecclesiastical touch—an organ touch, one might say, upon the lyre, his voluntaries tell us of God and the Lady Mary strolling together of an evening, and comprise ingenious conceits in quite the Little Gidding style,

O Word made flesh and born of women, love  
Abiding with us, we beheld thy glory,  
And know none other way of coronation  
Excepting thorns, excepting Golgotha

One more exceedingly versatile poet,\* independent of any group, satirist, amorist, and fantast, has included such purely religious pieces as *A Chorister in Avalon* (Avalon is seldom mentioned now-a-days) or *The Son of Man*, in his last book of lyric verse, *The Unknown Goddess*. But he is no unquestioning believer, but meets and answers, like the anonymous author of *The Carnal and the Crane*, objections that may arise

though God were only a phantom in the mist,  
pray to him, and it may be of your prayers  
of all your prayers the phantom God may clothe  
himself in your dream's unsubstantial flesh

“for, “he adds,”. . reality is the servant

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\* Humbert Wolfe



of the dream " A religious thread is drawn through *The Unknown Goddess*, practically from beginning to end, and dexterously avoiding allusions to Mr Joseph Chamberlain or Napoleon, so that one feels convinced that the author's spirit flies not so much

half way between Jesus in heaven  
and the ringing gods of Greece,

as nearer to the former and further from the latter

Of the future of religious poetry it is hard to speak, despite the later development of Mr Murry and the questionnaire on exceedingly intimate subjects recently issued by the *Nation-Athenaeum* Messrs Burns and Oates, it is true, continue to publish at intervals small volumes of monastic verse, but there is scarcely another sign on poetry's remotest horizon, of the reappearance of Polyhymnia

The following poets may also be found to be worth studying — Martin Armstrong (*Exodus, The Buzzards*), Charles Arnell, (*Random Rhymes of a Vectensian*) (Mr Arnell is editor of *The Decachord*), Herbert Asquith, (*The Volunteer*), Blunt, Wilfrid Scawen, (Poetical Works, 1914) Frank Betts, (*The Iron Age*), Maurice Baring, (*Poems 1914-1917*), Stella

Benson, (*Twenty*), Godfrey Elton, (*Schoolboys and Exiles*), John Freeman, (*Poems New and Old*) (Mr Freeman is as well known as he is saltless), Douglas Goldring, (*In the Town, On the Road*), Gerald Gould (*Monogamy, The Happy Tree*), Russell Green, who was on the editorial staff of *Côterie*, (*Venice*), Ford Madox Hueffer (*alias* Ford), (*On Heaven and other Poems*), Richard Hughes (*Gipsy Night*), Charlotte Mew, (*The Farmer's Bride*), E P. Mathers, (*Black Marigolds*), John Rodker, (*Poems*) Charles Sorley, (*Marlborough and Other Poems*) Fredegond Shove, (*Dreams and Journeys*), Tom Staveland (*Empty Day*), Edward Thomas (*Collected Poems*) Anna Wickham, *The Man with a Hammer*, Willoughby Weaving (*Star Fields, Daedal Wings*), Francis Brett Young, (*Collected Poems*) \*

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\* Many of the volumes of poetry mentioned in this book will be difficult to obtain in this country, but Japanese booksellers should be directed to apply to such London Shops as The Poetry Bookshop (30 Devonshire St., Theobald's Road London, W C 1) or to Mr Henderson's Bomb Shop, (66, Charing Cross Road, London) I may add that this advertisement is unsolicited!

## II. CRITICAL MODES

### I

To criticise is, first and foremost, to judge, and it is reasonable to expect that the judge or critic of art would be more concerned with the question of "what is the nature of this art?" than "who is this artist?" Nevertheless, that delight in biographical details, whether relevant or irrelevant to the immediate question of artistic quality—so little removed from the interest in petty scandals fostered in every suburban parlour, created, through its demand for them, such a vogue in the purveyance of domestic particulars, that a person who could refer to the apocryphal version of Davenant's ancestry was liable to be esteemed as much as he who had studied the whole of *Gondibert*. So irrepressible was this very human trait, that pseudo-biographical novels like Maurois' *Ariel* ran into editions and translations, threatening to create an era of legendary history comparable only to the

twelfth century exploitations of the Matter of Britain. This type of romance is an extreme development long before the stage was reached critics whose weight was already acknowledged were adding to their reputations by sedulously excavating the lower strata of gossip. The most eminent of such antiquarians in England was Sir Edmund Gosse, whose remarkable *flair* for racy little anecdotes has rendered such a book as *Aspects and Impressions* a model of the Instructive combined with the Amusing. He does not mingle fiction with biography, it is true, but he is the greatest living exponent of the more legitimate trick of blending gossip with criticism. The dangers of both methods are obvious, but the newer critical manner which, like Doctor Rumbold's Family pill, 'don't go fooling around, but attends strictly to business' has its perils as well, it is possible to ignore the personal side too completely, and thus lose some valuable clues to interpretation. M. Denis Saurat, in his rather startling book on Milton, gives a fresh interpretation of *Paradise Lost*, which he reads in the light of his theory that much of the poem symbolises the conflicts which arose in the

poet's mind as a result of marital unhappiness; it is an honest attempt to apply life to letters

Sir Edmund Gosse is not one of those who suffer from what Macaulay calls the "lues Boswelliana," and thus has passed over triumphantly into a time at which hero-worship is no longer in vogue. His gift for suave damnation is notorious, every rap on the knuckles is inflicted with a polite smile. "George Eliot admired Wordsworth very much, occasionally she reproduces very closely the duller parts of the *Excursion*. In . . . *A College Breakfast Party* . . . almost all Tennyson's faults are reconstructed on the plan of the Chinese tailor who carefully imitates the rents in the English coat he is to copy." This is far removed from Frederic Harrison's lyrical description of Ruskin as a latter-day St Francis or Elisha, and almost equally distant from the philosophical method, the road along which Aesthetic and Psychology trudge hand in hand, pursued by Herbert Read and I. A. Richards.

Professor Saintsbury stands nearer the "new path," but not so near that he is immune from attack by the juniors on the score of pedantry or lack of philosophy.

Read, commenting on Saintsbury's definition of poetry, observes that it "is more inclusive than Hazlitt's phrasing, but also more pedantic. . . Professor Saintsbury has obscured those very, modern notions of the unconscious and the involuntary reflex which Hazlitt had so presciently divined " A difference between the respective standpoints of Read and Saintsbury is at once indicated The latter had already made his apologia ; "I hold that the province of Philosophy is occupied by matters of the pure intellect and that literary criticism is busied with matters which, though not in the loosest meaning, are matters of sense " And later he opines that "aesthetics do not teach the reason of the amorous peace of the Poetic Moment " But surely this is just what aesthetics, or anyhow, the more recent more psychological aesthetics, set out to do ; and many beside their exponents would claim, no doubt, that the goal has been scored Secondly, in spite of this disclaimer and of the fact that he has always preserved his independence and avoided the jargon of the text-books, he takes his own wayward course through the aesthetic field ; he will protest that the Grand Style defies analysis,

time he stands aloof from the solemn band of juniors, Eliot, and Aldington among them, whose utterances have about them something of prophetic strain, in their whole-hearted honesty and seriousness. Both Gosse and Saintsbury reveal their origin in an earlier period by their faculty for a kind of dry and witty trifling, not to be confused with the more luscious order of epigrammatic fun which may be at its heaviest in Chesterton, and at its lightest, perhaps, in Dixon Scott.

Among the Elders, Professor Herbert Grierson is owed a great and insufficiently acknowledged debt for his labours among the 17th century metaphysical poets, and, as the latest schools of critics are turning more and more to these luminaries, he may be regarded as having laid a substantial part of the foundations of the age. He gives the lead to the younger men in emphasizing the psychological value, if the loose phrase may be permitted, of the Metaphysicals; "in the metaphysical subtleties of conceit," he tells us, "they found something that is more than conceit, symbols in which to express or adumbrate their apprehensions of the infinite," while in another place he speaks of the "finer psychology of which their

conceits are often the expression " Grierson, like the late Professor W. P. Ker, differs from Gosse and Saintsbury and fathers more conscientiously the modern spirit by his philosophic attitude, that impels him to penetrate to the hearts of things. It is the problem they present, beyond doubt, that chiefly endears the *Metaphysicals* to him, the sensuous pleasure that language and music afford must take second place. Free from the pleasant sin of trifling, he is saved by his sense of justice from the more flagitious practice of unreasoned adoration. In his edition of *Donne's Poems*, precious to the student, Donne is stripped of all those divine attributes which the present fashion is inclined to bestow on him, but Donne does not suffer as a poet in the process. "The 'wit' of Donne did not apparently include invention, for many of the episodes seem pointless and disgusting the vein of sheer ugliness which runs through his work, presenting details that seem merely and wantonly repulsive." But he adds that "the ugly has its place in art," while "decadence brought with it not ugliness but prettiness."

"W. P. Ker stood for the extreme of 'chastity' in critical method." The condensed



simplicity of his judgments left no room for blustering in the style, let us say, of Belloc, but again and again these disciplined sentences of his will be seen to be charged with an epigrammatic wit, which, one misses, and with regret, in junior writers who are sometimes too apt to go rambling on instead about psychoanalysis. Ker was one of the University 'academics' who may perhaps be regarded as standing apart from the journalist-critics who edit or contribute regularly to the literary columns. The Professors, though they may seem to the casual stranger to be living, claustral and remote from the centre of movement, actually play a large part in the direction of these movements, and that not merely an unconscious part. As an instance of Professor Ker's vigilance may be quoted his remark made some years since that "the eighteenth century is again coming into favour," this was said, I believe, before the market was flooded with anthologies and reprints of eighteenth century literature. And again, the concluding sentence of his *Essay on the Philosophy of Art* summarises the inward movement today of which Expressionism is but one symptom. "the music which is the creation of the

modern world expresses that which is inexpressible in all other arts—the mind's freedom from the contingency of the outward world and obedience to its own law." But it is curious that he should have confined this expression of freedom to music, since it extends to poetry, to pictorial and plastic art, but earlier in the same essay he goes so far as to say that art is "a return of the mind to itself after seeking law in the objective world." This is not, I should hasten to add, his exclusive definition of art, but is a part of it selected to show in what way he leads and observes certain modern tendencies. In another passage he demonstrates that "the artistic imagination is part of the highest morality, because it gets rid of the last selfishness of all—the Stoic selfishness which is proud of its superiority to external things." Severely epigrammatic expression of this kind places him at the end of the pole of wit that is furthest from Chesterton, chief leviathan of the sprightly school. Chesterton's witticisms are often so loosely knit as to become mere facetiae, as when he declares that Rossetti would have been more truly mediaeval if he had written "Tooral-ooral" as a refrain instead of "Tall Troy's

on fire," It is a case of sword and bauble  
 If the vintage of Ker is the driest "premier  
 cru" and that of Chesterton the fruitiest  
 and most heavily loaded, the late Sir Walter  
 Raleigh would be catalogued almost in the  
 very middle. He is generous with his  
 humour, without losing the dignity that years  
 of the rostrum have demanded, he examines  
 literature not merely for symptoms but for  
 primary causes, though not with the same  
 painfully intense concentration that distinguished  
 Professor Ker, and so his diagnosis  
 may stop short of an ultimate factor, or one  
 significant factor out of many may not be  
 given its due weight. He is concrete without  
 becoming heavy; erudite, yet never pedantic,  
 racy, but without any suggestion of crudity.  
 As a critic he might be said to be even  
 more excellent at presenting fact in a delightful  
 form than at endowing theory with strong  
 conviction. Pragmatically, (as in the two  
 essays on Romance)\* he will prove the theory  
 rather by a display of the working of it than  
 by isolated argument. When he is faced  
 with "straight" theorising he is tantalisingly  
 brief, as at the close of the second of the

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\* *Romance* 1916 Milford and Princeton Univ. Press.

two essays "For all its sins of flatness and prosiness the Classical school has always taught discipline" this is at once misleading and suggestive. The Classical School has taught other things besides discipline, and to mention this as though it were the only lesson is to suppress the soaring and passionate qualities of classical literature, which more than counterbalance the "flatness and prosiness," a great deal of which is due to the reader's own failure to understand Augustan (or Baroque, or Rococo) expression, just as one who is but slightly acquainted with music remains unmoved by Bach and the later works of Beethoven. A little further on, he adds, "but one discipline, at least, poetry cannot afford to neglect—the discipline of facts and life," and so touches on the rather over-driven problems of fantasy and reality, of the particular dream and the universal vision; and he sides with the psycho-analyst of today, and the ordinary thinking man who has read up the subject. But is it finally true? And will his concluding statement that "the poetry that can bear all naked truth" (from what goes before he probably means here the orthodox Reality) "and still keep its singing voice is .

the only immortal poetry," stand with no modification whatsoever? It depends on the reality of "Reality," a theme that just now seems to require development

Professor Ker remarked on the new interest in eighteenth century literature, and Sir Walter Raleigh,\* lecturing in 1913, thus addressed his audience at Newnham College. "now that Romance, after a long reign, has fallen into a decline, the newer kinds of Poetry take their cue from Donne and the metaphysicals whom Dryden supplanted" Both of these writers have done much to foster the newer spirit that is revaluing Dryden and his descendants, and is adding a more purely intellectual vigour to the metaphysical manner which he detected at that time, so that the "metaphysical" of 1926 may be found to have outdistanced enormously "the jewelled raptures of Francis Thompson and the vague ecstasies of Rabindranath Tagore" No doubt, if he were alive today, Sir Walter would not be surprised to discover that both of these poets have been relegated by fashion to the limbo of 'vieux jeu' and by judgment to a definite

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\* See *Some Authors* (Oxford, Clarendon Press, 1923).

and preterite stage in history The alertness that he admires in Whistler was also his

The charming manner does laudable work in criticism no less than the profound, and if Raleigh did not create any very new and startling views of literature, he indicated a great number of directions in which more minute research might be carried, and was at all times suggestive and evocative Thus he did not profess to take on his shoulders the grievous burden of interpreting Blake's prophetic books, but he gave some helpful hints as to the way to set about it, once more fulfilling the functions, not of the nutrient, but of the stimulant He points out that after all there is uniformity and consistency in the Titanic and at first sight obscure symbolism, and "no interpreter, who regards it as a series of whimsical, unrelated and fitful utterances dare hope for success" His explanation of Blake's view that the soul is nearest Heaven when it reaches outward, but in the power of Satan when it "bends to itself a joy," attaches him to the increasingly popular psychologic school that has been already referred to.

It is much to be regretted that Professor G S Gordon has not, hitherto, produced a

book of criticism ; and this is all the more to be deplored because of the lively and pregnant style of such essays, lectures, or introductions as are available to the ordinary reader,—in one of which he strikes most shrewdly at the present craze for reprints Mr Allardyce Nicoll is well known as a dramatic theorist , but it must not be forgotten that he contributed to the popularity which Dryden and Blake are now beginning to enjoy Mr Oswald Doughty is another of those who have directed our attention to the eighteenth century, though he submits himself far too easily to the hypnotic effect of the cant (and inaccurate) phrase, “ the tyranny of intellect ” Professor Gregory Smith and Mr Nichol Smith have both assisted the birth of a new critical age by their important labours among the old theorists of literature ; and it is owing to them that a large body of criticism and literary controversy, from Ascham onward, is now within the reach of all who live remote from the great libraries

## II

The background having been thus inadequately sketched in, figures that are closer in perspective remain for our scrutiny.

Mr Chesterton looms large among these, for the most part because of that sprightly manner that has been mentioned above. In his purely literary work, as in other departments, he has succeeded until lately in entertaining and delighting us no less with his sense than with his nonsense, though ever since *Fancies versus Fads*, a good deal of dull nonsense has crept in. But far back in 1903, when he published his *Browning* he was an apparently inexhaustible provider of fun, uproariously conscious fun like the imaginary descriptions by Meredith and Browning of a person being kicked down stairs, and uproariously unconscious fun when he leaps off the track with a kind of comical grandeur, thus “(Mr Santayana) describes the poetry of Browning most truly as the poetry of barbarism, by which he means the poetry which utters the primeval and indivisible emotions ‘For the barbarian is the man who regards his passions as their own excuse for being, who does not domesticate them either by understanding their cause, or by conceiving their ideal goal’ Whether this be or be not a good definition of the barbarian, it is an excellent definition of the poet. It might perhaps, be suggested that barbarians, . . . are generally highly



traditional and respectable persons who would not put a feather wrong in their headgear, and who generally have very few feelings and think very little about those they have. It is when we have grown to a greater and more civilised stature that we begin to realise and to put to ourselves intellectually the great feelings that sleep in the depths of us. Thus it is that the literature of our day has steadily advanced towards a passionate simplicity, and we have become more primeval as the world grows older, until Whitman writes huge and chaotic psalms to express the sensations of a schoolboy out fishing, and Maeterlinck embodies in symbolic dramas the feelings of a child in the dark." As criticism it is a divinely inspired example of the way not to do it—the supply of which perhaps is one of Chesterton's more useful functions, but the boisterous and dionysiac quality of the prose, (and in the extract he is not at his breeziest), places him at the head of the 'loitering and leaping' band. It is not intended to suggest that the Bacchanalian method is wrong, but merely to show that it is peculiar, and that it offers a convenient if perilous compartment to one who is attempting the thankless task of

attempting to tidy up modern English literature But "humane intoxication and expansion," to apply to Chesterton the term he uses of an emotion which inspired Dickens, is not conducive to clarity of vision, but rather to brilliant or absurd guesswork, and to brilliancy and absurdity in general Decidedly Dickensian in his "mental make-up," he triumphantly exposed the Gothic energy, the splendid vulgarity of his Victorian predecessor, the book on Dickens was, apart from detective fiction, his only entire success.

It would be unfair to call Mr J C Squire a milder Chesterton, for though there is something of a gently Bacchanalian and playful flavour about his prose, he is altogether more sensible, in the manner of the "good plain Englishman" *The London Mercury*,\* which takes its tone from him, is redolent of the "breakfast-room" aroma of native brightness and common-sense, of that pleasant and easy intellectuality that flatters the average man into feeling that literature is not after all, over his head The commercial side of journalism makes it imperative that this kind of flattery should be cultivated,

if the paper is not to die or to depend on subsidy; and nowhere is it more excellently cherished than in the *Mercury*. The system of letters without tears is not to be dismissed in silent scorn, as it certainly accomplishes something in the way of raising the intellectual level of our barbarians and populace; let it receive its due. The *Mercury* loiters rather than leaps; will tell us, speaking of Anatole France, that "to the masses he never really 'got across,'" that he was distinctly a traditionalist and a classicist. This is no news, and Chesterton would have turned and smitten France with quart pot and crosier, but it is soothing at times to be told that Queen Anne is dead, moreover there may still be some who are as yet unaware of the fact.

Mr Squire wrote many of his critiques and other essays for the *New Statesman* under the name of Solomon Eagle, which will explain the line of the malicious and crude satirist, "Squire the sublime, Eagle ridiculous." "Solomon Eagle" could not, with justice, be called ridiculous; a perusal of *Books in General* leaves one with a sense of very genuine admiration at his astuteness, at providing "what the public wants."

"Solomon Eagle" appears as a sort of refined John Bull, bluff without the uproariousness of Chesterton, sprightly, but less so than Arnold Bennett, relying on the raciness of the vernacular for his "point" rather than on the *bon mot*, which is too French and exotic, and steering clear of those uncharted straits of controversy and dialectic which the Anglo-American school more rashly navigates. It is instructive to compare the two following quite typical opening gambits, the former from Squire on Burton's *Anatomy*, the latter from Eliot on The Function of Criticism. "I haven't noticed anybody celebrating, but this 1921 happens to be the tercentenary year of the publication of Burton's *Anatomy*, a book which Sterne stole from, which Dr Johnson reviewed, and which Lamb finally established in its rightful high place in our literature."

"Writing several years ago on the subject of the relation of the new to the old in art, I formulated a view to which I still adhere, in sentences which I take the liberty of quoting, because the present paper is an application of the principle they express:

"The existing monuments form an ideal

order among themselves .. .." etc In these two short extracts extreme opposities may be perceived; the garrulous "wet" style and the formal "dry"—concrete and abstract, with an impassable gulf set between them And it becomes clear that both may possess serious disadvantages Of these two particular passages, the former irritates the average *student* because it is too slangy, the latter because it is too near to a caricature of the professorial manner, but both authors have been caught, it goes without saying, at their less fortunate moments The refined John Bull who will have something to say about Burton or Jeffrey while confessing to a relish for a detective story, can be on occasion rather too sweeping, it is not enough to say that Milton and Wordsworth were two of the most intellectual of our poets, and to leave it at that But neither Bull-Eagle nor the public that he typifies would care for the contest that must be won, the arguments that must be thrashed out, before such a view could be upheld without reservation; It is small wonder, therefore, that he so seldom commits himself to any action, whether offensive or defensive, on a large scale.

Edward Shanks is another poet-critic of

the *Mercury*, with the gift for light entertainment that seems to be demanded by the standard of this journal, though he is not of the boisterous order. Indeed it is possible to nod at moments over his prose, as it is over his verse. This may be due in part to uncertainty of touch, which sets him at a place lower than Squire's at the Poppins Court symposium\*. There is also some uncertainty in his literary orientation, somewhere he writes, "the novel was, broadly speaking, the last province of speech to be conquered by writing. It appeared spasmodically in the ancient world and in the mediaeval world." He mentions Petronius, Achilles Tatius, and Longus, (but not Heliodorus, Apuleius, or Iamblichus, to say nothing of anonymous novels like the very "influential" *Apollonius of Tyre*, and various minor novelists who wrote between the first century and Heliodorus), and manages to ignore the very large body of metrical novels, whether Byzantine or Anglo-French, that the Middle Ages produced, by rather hastily concluding that "prose fiction the written descendant of the first anecdote told by Eve to Adam did not begin to

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\* But the days of Poppins' Court are past

take definite and unassailable shape until some two or three hundred years ago." This will not do at all, the Romance and the Byzantine verse novel, with their definite shapes, are as directly descended from the Adamic anecdote which never existed as the three-volume novel, and the shape of the three-volume novel is as assailable as Mr Joyce's *Ulysses*. It is remarks of this kind that widen unnecessarily the gulf between the Professors and the Journalists. His little book on Bernard Shaw in the *Writers of the Day* series must be fairly well known in Japan, fulfilling, like its sister volumes, a modest aim. If, there is anything startling to say about Mr Shaw, (and it is doubtful whether there is,) Mr Shanks does not say it here, but contents himself with such a plain setting forth of facts as may be useful to the postulant student, varying the regular and temperate pace of the march with an occasional mild gambol. "I propose to deal with . . the Shaw who does not care whether it is his grandmother or his grandchildren, whom he is teaching to suck eggs . .", but apart from this poor and ancient joke he is polite to Shaw, and pays him one or two playful little compliments, such as calling

him "a tall old gentleman with a white beard and alert, but mild and benevolent eyes" This is the method, as employed by Dodson and Fogg, of predisposing the jury in favour of their clients, the method that is so abhorrent to the Eliot school, but still dear to the public

The talent for conveying that *bonhomie* which, if a trifle heavy, goes doubtlessly a long way towards maintaining the circulation of the *Mercury*, is vouchsafed in generous measure to Mr J B Priestley, a frequent contributor to the paper, who is a master of that appreciative style in which faults are discreetly minimised or passed over His *Figures in Modern Literature* takes us back, nearly as far as Frederick Harrison, and well out of range of Sir Edmund Gosse's malice, he all but persuades us that Messrs De La Mare and Maurice Hewlett are and were the greatest writers of the last thirty years, until we find, after a more thorough perusal of the book, that Mr Robert Lynd and Mr W W. Jacobs have, together with half-a-dozen others, equal claims to this distinction His essay on Squire might have been mistaken for the product of a mutual admiration society, were not the others



scarcely less laudatory in tone Speaking of the poem, *August Moon*, he assures us that "here we have the atmosphere, the slow continuity, of reverie, and yet here too the colossal insanity, the awful intrusion, of war has never been more effectively dramatised " The lines so described run as follows

There are voices passing, a murmur of quiet  
 voices,  
 A woman's laugh, and children going home,  
 A whispering couple, leaning over the railings,  
 And somewhere, a little splash as a dog goes in

I have always known all this, it has always been,  
 There is no change anywhere, nothing will ever  
 change

I heard a story, a crazy and tiresome myth

Listen ! behind the twilight a deep low sound  
 Like the constant shutting of very distant doors

Doors that are letting people over there  
 Out to some other place beyond the end of  
 the sky.

The reader may judge for himself of the value of these hyperbolics It is true that Arnold Bennett and H G Wells have come in for moments of severity ; " (in Bennett's style) we too often hear the click and rattle

of efficient mechanism that is functioning freely Even in his best things he never achieves a really fine style," but "never at his worst has he fallen into the disgraceful slovenliness that spoils so much of Mr Wells' later work, and at his best, though he may not reach the last subtleties of construction or the ultimate felicities of style, he has shown a fine conscientious craftsmanship and has done all that a man can consciously do to bring his work near to perfection " And the article concludes with a perfect fanfare of triumph, Mr Bennett has, "by dint of rare understanding and noble labour" created characters that are to rank in "that great procession which is headed by Hamlet and Falstaff, Uncle Toby and Cleopatra, Becky Sharp and Squire Western, Mr Pickwick and the Wife of Bath"! He might have included Mark Sabre, whose longevity seems no less assured than that of Denry The contrast between the good plodding admiration, relieved with the gentlest of jocular touches, of this book, and the exuberant acrobatics of Dixon Scott's *Men of Letters*\* is extraordinary The

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\* Hodder and Stoughton

intense light shed by Dixon Scott reveals Squire, Shanks and Priestley huddled together in a group, "like moral cattle in a pinfold" He lavishes his brilliance like a young man of 26, though the essays in *Men of Letters* were written after he was thirty, and shortly before he died of dysentery in the Gallipoli war area, and his portraiture of Arnold Bennett, (to take an instance), will be found to be far livelier than Mr Priestley's 'We are shown a benevolent "sharper" who tricks us for our good, an optimist, vulgar and romantic, who is "identified with the great cause of cheering us all up" — Denry Machin himself, in fact; while the literary aspect of Mr Bennett remains where it should,—in the background The impetus of a youthful spirit will carry its fortunate owner safely across the most perilous abysses, and after having taken in its stride so cheap a sally as "this morning sees Mr Arnold Bennett playing Cards again" his spirit will not astonish us when it negotiates successfully that very type of colloquial opening that we should deprecate in Mr Squire,—"there's a nasty implication in the thought, perhaps —yet it isn't mere professional resentment that makes one sternly retort that *The*

*Innocence of Farther Brown* fairly proves the guilt of Mr Chesterton " He is the true Bacchanal tossing words about like thyrsi and calling Chesterton's detective tales 'simply goluptious,' not forgetting to add that they are "magnificent nonsense " His enthusiasm is not allowed to betray him into the "criticism of worship," and so, when he is patting his victim most cordially upon the back with one hand he tweaks his nose, if the punishment seem to be deserved, with the other, if Chesterton "has the poet's gift for seeing the most commonplace things with a startling freshness and suddenness," he also "tries to pack his energies into tushery like this," while a passage in *When a Man's Single* moved him to exclaim "much as we love our Barrie we have to admit that these words are writ in butter," The light, proceeding from himself, whereby he observes the Men as revealed in their letters, is searching but roseate, or intermittently so, and one would hesitate to trust his judgement implicitly, on such matters as the excellence of Whitman or Stanley Houghton But he affords an example of the "emotional" style of criticism at its very best, and convinces one that, though

this style has been responsible for a deal of nonsense, in hands so delicate as his it can be made a thing of considerable worth

At this juncture I would invite the attention of the student to the last chapter of Mr Osbert Burdett's *The Beardsley Period (The Bodley Head, 1925)* in which he develops the theme of Post-Wildian compromise, which is an essential factor in the Georgian synthesis, and largely the *raison d'être* of the *Mercury*. Mr Burdett is endowed with the gift of perspective, and places the Squire coterie (though he refuses to call it so) pretty accurately before its late Victorian background. The compromise has probably done some good in bringing a not too strenuous type of culture within the comprehension the person who has had a secondary school education, sufficient to excite vague aesthetic aspirations. "Idiosyncrasy and extravagance have been discarded in an attempt to bridge the gulf that divides the intellectual from the active life of the nation." But the *London Mercury*, "whose orange cover gave to the yellow symbol of its so different precursor a more sober and discreeter tinge, showed the courage of its editor's beliefs" and provided, as it were,

an escalator from the lower to the upper bourgeoisie

Nearly all of the journalists and poets mentioned in the preceding section have used the concrete mode of criticism have dealt with men, life, and letters, and have avoided the discussion of such general principles as emerge from discussions on Style, Great Poetry, Poetry, or Art, which bring the more polemical factions swarming into the field, furthermore, the majority of the belligerents avoid those intimate touches in which the Mercury group and others excel, adopting a colder impersonal tone, an unfairly chosen sample of which has been already extracted from Mr T S Eliot But "some few there are who walk between" of whom none is more admirably independent than Mr Aldous Huxley, formerly in charge of a literary page of the *Athenaeum*. This weekly, now amalgamated with the Nation, was then a self-contained literary paper under the editorship of Mr Middleton Murry, inclining gracefully, glancing tactfully, towards the left centre There is more of sobriety and restraint about Mr Huxley than about Mr Dixon Scott, who on occasion would indulge in flourishes and "idle fino,"

as the old song has it; but Mr. Huxley manages to be vivid and vigorous in a drier manner, epigram following epigram in a caustic procession, a river of potash "The *Ecclesiastical Sonnets* are absolute bathos, just as the finest passages in the *Prelude* and *Excursion* are absolute poetry," "Compare the music of *The Beggar's Opera* with the music of a contemporary revue They differ as life in the garden of Eden differed from life in the artistic quarter of Gomorrah," and so forth As he pursues his shrewd and witty way in the track of some particular author, he touches on the general principles as applied in the past and the present, an essay on Ben Jonson will include valuable hints for the young poet of this age as well as a rather too contemptuous dismissal of Shadwell or *The Loves Of the Plants* Some of the hints for the young poets suffer also a little from overstatement "The artist is told that he should have no theories, that he should warble native woodnotes wild . should starve his brain and cultivate his heart and spleen, that an artistic theory cramps the the style . and so on" He calls this naturalistic theory of art "foolish and sentimental," whereas it is not necessarily

more so than some ultra-intellectual theory It is certainly wrong, because it is arbitrarily exclusive, and because it has produced far more poetical rubbish than any other poetic theory, but there are plenty of sentimental and foolish people who rave about "intellectual poetry," Mr Huxley, and Mr Eliot. The fault here was not, after all *over*-statement, but *under*-statement, which left the impression that the sentimentality and folly was confined to the anti-intellectual view. But later on, in the same essay, he detects an error into which the intellectuals may fall, and have fallen, though as far as I can tell, it has entrapped more painters than poets; "we see to-day how a fear of becoming sentimental, or "chocolate-boxy," drives many of the younger poets and artists to shrink from treating of the great emotions or the obvious lavish beauty of the earth" This is very true, but it is probable that Mr Huxley would rigidly exclude sentimentality from the company of the great emotions, since he has his knife into Rousseau, who "invented humanitarianism Syphilis and broken legs were still more comic in Smollett's day than in our own There is a cruelty, a heartlessness about



much of the older humour which is.. ....in its less extreme forms, pleasantly astringent ... .after the... .sentimental comedy in which we are nowadays forced to indulge " Mr Huxley is the "honnête homme," but not the plain bluff Englishman and while he theorises sensibly about art, he does not use it as a grindstone for a philosophical axe The detachment which he cultivates and which keeps him sardonically isolated from the mêlée of the aesthetic doctrines enables him to view the history of art as a kind of cinematographic show "How many styles have come and gone during the last seventy years! Pre-Raphaelism, impressionism, art nouveau, futurism, post-impressionism, cubism, expressionism It would have taken the Egyptians a hundred centuries to run through such a fortune of styles", one begins to realise that sound sense about art can only be talked at a distance from the racket of the manifestos His remarks upon art and letters are not confined to the two books of essays, *On the Margin* and *Along the Road*, but are scattered about his novels, imparting to them a pleasant and not too severely intellectual savour Mr Lytton Strachey may be said to resemble him in

that he too maintains an elegant and literary attitude, whether he be contemplating life or letters, and is not to be lured either into the abstract wildernesses of aesthetic, or the practical laboratory of the psychoanalyst Mr Strachey's prose has a stronger "tang," perhaps, than that of any of his contemporaries it fairly reeks of the eighteenth century. But then, his mind is modelled, consciously and unconsciously, on the Augustan mind, though he thinks, not so much in the periwigged, Palladian language of Gibbon as in the more sinewy idiom of Macaulay, and he is subtler and wittier than Macaulay, though less Olympian. He would never permit himself to be carried away, by any violent squeamishness, to a point at which critical decorum is abandoned, and the outraged sensibility finds relief in such violent abuse as Macaulay's notorious passage, "Wycherley's indecency is protected against the critics as a skunk is protected against its hunters. It is safe, because it is too filthy to handle and too noisome to approach." This lapse into Billingsgate would be impossible in "the eighteenth century grown up; . Voltaire at two hundred and thirty" as Aldous Huxley calls Mr Strachey in his

brilliant little article Mr Huxley has perfectly described the Stracheyan system as applied to the mystical, such as Blake with whom he is not at home, the eccentric, such as Lady Hester Stanhope, and the Victorian, or worldly masquerading as unworldly or, in a strange and stuffy manner over the boundary of the otherworld, as Gordon was; Mr Huxley seems to be correct in assuming that "one cannot imagine Mr Strachey coping with Dostoevsky or with any of the other explorers of the soul" I for one, (as Mr Priestley might say) cannot, Dostoevsky is an apostle of the Higher Sentimentality, and Mr Strachey is a hopeless anti-sentimentalist But he flung all his ingenuity and resource into a lecture on Pope, from which his audience must have arisen with the uncomfortable impression that Pope was a passionate and even romantic poet,—an Augustan Tennyson, as much as anything else. Gone was the venomous, "rhyming and rattling" manufacturer of couplets, and in his place a new star glowed with more various spectrum Once more the voice of the people, though it were the voice of God, proved to be wrong

*Books and Characters, Eminent Victorians,*

and *Queen Victoria*,\* read as enthrallingly as a detective story, one is reminded of a phrase of Praed's, "potatoes ate like pine" The sarcasm, the gusto, subdued by Olympian distance and antique diction, the frequent and dramatic device of the double or multiple semicolon, elicit a stronger excitement than the most intricate plot of Mr and Mrs G D H Cole, hatched between two Syndicalist schemes, could arouse "She corresponded daily with her future Husband in a mingled flow of German and English but the accustomed routine reasserted itself; the business and pleasures of the day would brook no interruption; Lord M was once more constantly besides her, and the Tories were as intolerable as ever" It is of the nature of a mannerism, but it is most effective Mr. Strachey, as a biographer-critic, so arranges and emphasises the biographical facts that they are a criticism in themselves, and makes them appear to suggest those very motives which they would seem at first sight to deny. It may be gathered from contemporary magazines, that the "Stracheyan system" is infectious and is being imitated at the present time in America

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\* Chatto and Windus.

- There is a suppressed tigerishness about Mr. Strachey, a not infrequent tone of impatience with human folly, amounting even to misanthropy, in Mr Huxley's writings, for which Mr Norman Douglas substitutes a charming mixture of sympathy and cynicism. Though he is a topographer and novelist in the first instance, he has produced a small amount of literary criticism that cannot be passed over in silence, and anyone who has read his articles on Doughty's *Arabia Deserta*,\* and on Charles Waterton\* will no doubt agree. Like his junior, Mr Huxley, he has the art of throwing out aphorisms on the (comparatively) universal while ostensibly engaged with the particular, in the essay on *Arabia Deserta* may be found a plea for recognition of the value of the dream or fantasy-element in art, a dig at utilitarianism, and a significant comparison of the Anglo-Saxon with the French literary spirit in topography. He goes "bald-headed" for the paralysing effect of the Academy; and such an attack launched by such a man at a time when rigidity and formality are in danger of

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\* *Experiments* (Chapman and Hall) 1925

excessive admiration, should be salutary in its effect "Must language," he cries, "the child of necessity, be clipped and ground like a box hedge? Must a living organism be at the mercy of a pack of dismal gentlemen in frock coats?" But of course we can retort that the academised art may maintain an excellence between, let us say, eighty and sixty per cent, the non-academised art, that grows "freely under the sun and stars," while it may touch ninety per cent, (assuming with him that it can reach a higher absolute level than than the academised, which is open to question) may sink as low as ten One feels that it is Mr. Douglas's kindness, his love for seductive by-paths and entertaining idiosyncrasies, that attracted him to that cavalier of crocodiles, Charles Waterton, whom sterner minds, preoccupied perhaps with fundamentals, would have ignored But, thanks to these admirable qualities, the world is the richer for being re-introduced (Waterton had a good "press" in his day) to this curious personage, who might have stepped out of one Lear's nonsense books, a consorter with owls, who is not above a mild flirtation with a female chimpanzee, or "rushing with

furious growls from under the hall table at your visitors' legs, pretending (at the age of eighty) to be house-dog "

The study of this pleasant and eccentric naturalist should assist the foreigner (excepting perhaps M Chevrillon) to understand the psychology of a matter-of fact nation that has produced an Erasmus as well as a Charles Darwin; a nation whose poets have advised us to "get with child a mandrake root" or warn us that

"he who torments the chafer's sprite  
Weaves a bower in endless night "

Mr Douglas on Poe is too slight, and more should have been made of the *Rationale of Verse*, but the essay is chiefly interesting for an exposition of the theory, already dating as the Read school grows in strength,\* that didacticism in poetry "constitutes an intrusion which arouses, even in ordinary minds, a sense of incongruity and impropriety " This places Mr Douglas in a definite position on the aesthetic chess-board, and is the logical outcome of his strongly anti-puritan view

The three writers mentioned last are, each in his respective way, among the most

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\* This is something of an hypothesis

witty of our living authors, being neither exclusive literary critics nor pure theorists, they may take advantage of the greater wealth of material which life adds to letters, for the exercise of their considerable powers of satire and whimsy. Two other authors who stand more or less centrally independent, and treat of letters more than of life, manage to be facetious, and even malicious at moments. These are Gerald Gould and Harold Monro, the former of whom has written a most useful elementary textbook on modern English fiction, the latter on modern English poetry. Some eighteen years ago Gould published a prize essay on *The Nature of the Lyric*, a sane and sober piece of work.

Towards the end he lets fall a remark that reminds us once more of faction and fashion, of those who attack and defend the *Zeitgeist*. "Undeniably each particular epoch both demands and renders possible a particular kind of artistic effect." There are some, on the other hand who would suppress the power of the age, or attribute it to the power of the man. But it is the game of Big-endians and Little-endians, after all, that does so much to keep the critical spirit alive.

Passing on to 1924, the year in which



*The English Novel of To-day* appeared, we find that the Muse of Mr Gould has grown appreciably more skittish, too much so at times, perhaps, considering that the demi-goddess has long arrived at matronly and discreet years. One is very nearly pained upon meeting such a joke as this (in a discussion of Ronald Firbank); "(a) sentence .... runs " It's extraordinary Gerald doesn't go dotty. "Well, a very little more of writing about Ronald " But the book is serious as a whole, and is founded upon the rock of an artistic creed obviously formulated after long and careful thought. He defies the Oedipus Complex, ("in the range of human experience a mother may be her boy's best friend, but not his best girl,") and deprecates the 'heresy' for which he holds Freud and Jung partially responsible, that "the aberration is more important than the norm". It is clear throughout that he would have the novelist 'see life steadily and see it whole' and when he says that realism means selection (it is surely selective realism that requires selection) he means rather that truth, the fundamental truth which he distinguishes from a truth, demands selection if it is to be indicated in the confined area of

a novel One might almost call Mr Gould a Realist in the mediaeval sense, for there is something of this platonic tradition in his faith in the universal truth

The classification of novels is to-day an exceedingly difficult manner, and though Mr Gould's headings have their convenience it is doubtful whether division into psychological, biographical, straightforward, sociological, and smaller groups, is a solution of the problem, yet schools and tendencies, left, centre, and right, Edwardian, Georgian, and Post-Georgian, extrovert and introvert, subjective and objective, are all more or less unsatisfactory systems of discrimination, and his, eked out with certain sub-divisions, provides a fair working basis

Mr Monro's slenderer volume\* appeared in 1920, when it at once appealed to those who, like its author, feared "intellectual" poetry, and a vocabulary that includes words not generally encountered in colloquial speech "Need it be remarked," he inquires, "that the language of the best poetry is the nearest to ordinary speech? We are not startled, but we cannot fail to be interested

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\* *Some Contemporary Poets* 1920 (Leonard Parsons)

to find 'The Quiet House' open with the lines .

When we were children old Nurse used to say,  
The house was like an auction or a fair  
Until the lot of us were safe in bed "

But the sad truth is that we, or many of us, fail to be either startled or interested in such lines, and in the weakly Wordsworthian principle that governs them, which was one of the Georgian conventions that possibly did more harm to poetry than any other. Elsewhere he observes that intellect "is the servant of poetry, but a dangerous servant, apt to interfere " The old crude hostility between "intellect" and "emotion" has given place, on the whole, to subtler and more accurate views that will not admit of so arbitrary a dichotomy. It is now easier to understand his attack on Robert Nichols and his admiration of a Miss Charlotte Mew.

The countermarch to biographical criticism requisite to an examination of "Rebecca West's" fascinating study of Henry James in Nisbet's series, is clumsy, but the propitious course steered by Cecily Fairfield (the private name of this redoubtable critic) between Scylla and Charybdis, brutal fact and

to attain its objective with a rapidity so much greater than Sir Edmund Gosse's, that one begins to be certain that, in the department of damaging reputations, the female critic is beyond all doubt superior. But this very strength is also her undoing, twice she goes out of her way to vent, both times irrelevantly, her spleen on the late Mrs Humphry Ward. It is true that the eminent founder of the Children's Happy Evenings was in no sense a great novelist, but as lady novelists of the time went she called for no especial praise or abuse, and after all the same thing applies to the author of *The Judge*,—*quā* novelist, that is. But we do not read a critique of James in order to be told that "Rebecca West" dislikes Mrs Ward. One would like to think that her assault on this lady, and Mr Monroe's on Mr Nichols, were both actuated solely by a feeling of outrage done to aesthetic sensibilities; or must one, after all, regard them as instances, exacerbated, of personal animus,—the echoes of a fine old British critical fashion? At any rate they are neither of them pedagogues, nor have their fisticuffs aught in common with the solemn swish of the birch-rod, a faint echo of which, borne

down the century from the days of Hazlitt and Macaulay, is still faintly and intermittently audible in the *Criterion*

Among the work of younger editors and researchers, that of Edmund Blunden deserves especial notice. His rediscovery of John Clare, in which he participated with Alan Porter,\* created something of a sensation, which however, as far as the less discriminating were concerned, might be attributed to the excavation of the buried treasure rather than to the admirable methods of the excavators. The preface to *John Clare* (Cobden-Sanderson, 1920) is chiefly biographical, but the biography is at the same time an interpretation of a poetic character, the particulars strictly and triumphantly relevant. It is not merely that we are shown the development of Clare from derivative phases, from the pose of rustic poet, and from the (then)† not uncommon state of mind in which literary forgery became a temptation; but small items of fact are given their proper significance without exaggeration, and are made to throw light in dark places. To quote from the preface itself; “to insist in

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\* a poet who has published far too little

† Ireland died in 1834.

the financial affairs of Clare may seem blatant, or, otiose actually, the treatment which he underwent was a leading influence in his career." It might be objected that too little space has been allotted to the discussion of the actual poetry, especially since there is little satisfaction to be gained from the critical part of Symons' introduction to his 'Oxford' edition. But what there is, is concise and to the point, the approximation of his later vision to the (non-prophetic) mood of William Blake is in itself a subject for a thesis, and for much psychological investigation.

In surveying the genius of Christopher Smart,\* another poet confined in the madhouse, Mr Blunden is careful, again, to discard everything apocryphal and uncertain, and to stick to data. He is thus able to provide a setting for *A Song to David* (which might otherwise be regarded as the production of "an ingenious hack suddenly snatched up by the whim of the gods"), and to show that other of Smart's poems are "commentary to the *Song* . . ." The sublimity of this poem is Hebraic in origin,

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\* *A Song to David with other poems chosen with preface and notes by Edmund Blunden* (Cobden-Sanderson, 1924)

but naturalised by its author ; and the relation of this sublimity to the "Impression" of Smart's own poetic (Smart uses the term for a certain power with which a poet may endue a word or sentence) is suggested briefly but pregnantly in Mr Blunden's preliminary address, a lengthy argument would be impossible in the preface to a seventy-page selection, but the editor rightly contents himself with offering provocative and sufficient material for such an argument Mr Blunden is not a controversialist, but his reticence is always challenging

His latest critical volume, that has but recently appeared, contains within its small compass some most acceptable comments on, and translations of, "our Vaughan," the translations being of course certain of Vaughan's Latin poems Englished with sympathy and inspiration\*\* That another Metaphysical should be brought to the full daylight at this present poetic phase, and that Mr Blunden, after the unmistakable drift of *English Poems* should assist him to prominence, is not surprising Further

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\*\* *On the Poems of Henry Vaughan Characteristics and Intimations With the principal Latin poems carefully translated into English verse* (Colbden-Sanderson, 1927).

evidence on behalf of the recent growth of interest in the Stuart Metaphysicals is adduced by Mr Blunden, who notes that whereas Lyte, prefacing an edition of Vaughan in 1847, presumed that "a desire will naturally arise to know something respecting the Author," there have been three editions of him since 1896, "besides a number of small reprints" Vaughan is shown, through his poetry, as a physician, an Hermetist, a soldier, a moralist, an observer of nature and of "bright *shoots* of everlastingness", he appears, now contemplating in an ecstasy the great Ring of pure and endless Light, now serene in the aftermath, in which it is healthy to "dig the garden or go fishing" The comparison of him with Herbert is brief, too brief perhaps, though pregnant He claims for the master, ingenuity, for the pupil, genius. "The object of" (Herbert's) "journey is God according to vestry arrangements; a noble ideal .but narrow in comparison with Vaughan's solar, personal, firmamental, flower-whispering, rainhow-browed, ubiquitous, magnetic Love" This is excellent, compressed, and capable of elaboration, and indicates a path for copious research, as do



the notes on Vaughan's plainly deliberate use of italics This book is welcome, moreover, as the first piece of literary criticism from Mr. Blunden that stands by itself, without the support that an introduction may be imagined to derive from the text, and has the two further merits of being timely and indispensable

#### IV

Mr T S Eliot and the *Egoist* did much to increase the purely intellectual element in English criticism, and his collection of essays entitled *The Sacred Wood*, (Methuen) was a fingerpost set in the direction of scrupulous care, logic, and scholarship Theory was now taking an increasingly important position; books on style and poetic began to multiply. This activity was certainly due in no small measure to the "performing Yanks" and their associates, but it was by no means confined to them; neither Lascelles Abercrombie nor Middleton Murry belong to their company, while Wyndham Lewis has, or had, a very flourishing coterie of his own. They provide, nevertheless, a convenient starting-point. Mr Eliot strove

in the first place to fix such part of the public attention as was workable, on good literature (it is true) but particularly on good, or rather, the purer kind of, criticism Aristotle, Dryden, Boileau, Rémy de Gourmont, are given by him a wider circle of notice than that of university students, Pater, on the other hand is shown to be a fallible critic, capable of appealing to minds "so enfeebled or so lazy as to be afraid of approaching a genuine work of art to face face" But when he wrote this the Pater cult in England was in its last coma, there is still, however, a place for Mr Eliot's warning among Japanese students of English literature

His essay on *The Function of Criticism* brings the theorist up short against the supreme importance of fact He speaks very plainly indeed "Any book . which produces a fact even of the lowest order about a work of art is a better piece of work than nine-tenths of the most pretentious critical journalism . ." "Even the discovery of Shakespeare's laundry bills may ultimately prove to have been of some use, after all .. we must always reserve final judgement as to the futility of the research which has discovered them, in the possibility that some

genius will appear who will know of a use to which to put them " This is a hard but wholesome saying ; and it must not be made easier by misconstruing it as an excuse for biographical tattling for its own sake , fact used as intriguing local colour is not the same thing as fact used for interpretation He continues in the same ruthless vein " *fact* cannot corrupt taste The real corrupters are those who supply opinion or fancy," and M Maurois is thus irretrievably damned The sanction of the critic is limited to " an honest inquiry as far as the data permit " But in practice, and presumably within these limits, speculation may be carried to considerable length, since we come upon Mr Eliot at two speculative moments devoted to Marlowe , in the first he writes, "*Dido* appears to be a hurried play, perhaps done to order with the *Aeneid* in front of him " , in the second, " Marlowe's verse might have moved. . toward this intense and serious and indubitable great poetry, which . attains its effects by something not unlike caricature " But both passages are not so far from data as to be illegitimate ; and we have only to compare them with, say, Arthur Symonds's remarks on the Elizabethan " Tragedy of

Blood," which he so gaily detaches from its Senecan background, to see the difference between what can and what cannot be permitted

Perhaps nothing has been written by Mr Eliot that is more significant of the new "scholarly" attitude than his inaugural essay, *The Idea of a Literary Review*, which prefaced the first number of the remodelled *New Criterion* (Jan 1926). The *New Criterion* will illustrate a theory and identify itself with tendency; the theory being that "pure literature is a chimera of sensation," that literature cannot be isolated from its "non-literary sources," and that a literary review must therefore represent the sources as well as the literature emanating therefrom; the tendency, "a tendency. . toward a higher and clearer conception of Reason, and a more severe and serene control of the emotions by Reason." The literary review should, and this one will, include articles on current work in anthropology, history, archaeology, and sciences within the comprehension and range of interest of the average cultured person. The "dead" element in the present, which Mr Eliot sees in *St. Joan* or *Christina Alberta's Father* will

be abandoned in favour of the more vital spirit which he discovers in Benda's *Belphegor*, or *L'Avenir de l'intelligence* by Charles Maurras. It may be noted in passing that Mr. Eliot, reversing the process of other essayists, and in dealing with more general considerations, drops a few luminous hints about particular instances; thus, "at one point in his novel Mr Wells lapses from vulgarity into high seriousness," and "Mr Shaw reveals himself as the artist whose development was checked at puberty."

The *New Criterion* has certainly fulfilled, hitherto, the aims of its editor. It has published work by Mr Massingham in his new anthropological guise, and M Massis' alarmist fulminations against oriental thought, (in which he has been anticipated by Mr Chesterton). There have been articles on Mexico, Hindu music, and the late Lord Curzon. Unity has, on the whole, been preserved, through the selection or co-operation of writers in sympathy with the movement like Herbert Read, Ramon Fernandez, Virginia Woolf, or E M Forster, so that the danger of a miscellany is safely avoided. The *Criterion*, new and old, preserves its highly admirable tone, in which it might be

considered impertinent by its most enthusiastic admirers to discern a solemnity occasionally a shade more conscious than agrees with a queasy "mental" stomach; the ghost of the flavour of that compost of reverence and embarrassment that one used to notice amongst Englishmen when somebody pronounced the word "God," or among the disciples of Pater upon hearing the word "Beauty," seems to trail a momentary cerecloth upon such pages of the *Criterion*\* as are imprinted with the word "Reason," until one begins, perhaps groundlessly, to suspect that after all the Anglo-Saxon cannot do without his religion "A higher and clearer conception of Reason," writes Mr. Eliot, substitute for the last word the name of a more anthropomorphic divinity, and we are back at church and chapel "And why not?" let us ask By all means transfer this emotion of worship, apparently so ineradicable as far as English and Americans are concerned, to the Altar of Reason, the thing has been done before by the French, like *Vers Libre* and Dadaism, we have the best authority But in general an' apart from the heaviness

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\* Founded in 1922

of Mr D. H Lawrence's contributions, the peeling organ does not grind too obtrusively, considering the national "consistency" of the matter supplied; and one must recollect that the *Criterion* is rather more cosmopolitan than most contemporary journalism. It is likely to do no harm, and capable of doing a vast amount of good. The exhibition of a little reason-worship was lately, and is still in a less measure, indicated.

Messrs Eliot and Read provide an ideal counter-irritant to Messrs Shanks and Squire, they rouse us from the pleasant lethargy into which the sedative qualities of the latter have lulled us, and we wake to find that the comprehension of art demands of us the most strenuous endeavour, the most scrupulous care. "The critic" says Read, "must aim to discover some utmost extent of mental territory to which the given expression of the author may be related". "science and poetry have but one ideal, which is the satisfaction of the reason": "metaphysical poetry is determined logically its emotion is a joy that comes with the triumph of the reason, and is not a simple instinctive ecstasy". The taste for "simple bird-song" seems to be passing, if not from the populace, from

those who may, for all we know, be shaping the taste of the populace a few generations hence, if they come to be influenced by "an intelligent minority of considerable vigour and positive achievement"

The critical spirit must also be changed; it is Mr. Read's aim to raise it "above the vague level of emotional appreciation through the incorporation of scientific elements," but at present "the great majority of critics. . . depend on their emotions" This is nothing but the truth: it is not difficult to see how large a part is played by "raw" emotion in the work of the critics mentioned in section II (above) He then proceeds to examine psychoanalysis\* as a possible scientific basis of criticism, and asks himself these three questions

I What general function does psycho-analysis give to literature?

II How does psycho-analysis explain the process of poetic creation or inspiration?

III. Does psycho-analysis cause us to extend in any way the function of criticism?

Even if he is personally satisfied, he might, for the benefit of his readers, have

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\* *Reason and Romanticism* (Faber & Gwyer) 1926



asked and discussed a fourth question how far is psycho-analysis in its present state an exact and a reliable science? We are sure of certain appearances, such as those of phantasy and "reality" (a most unsatisfactory and question-begging term), or of comparatively inward-personal and outward-universal moods, which we are obliged to describe metaphorically in words like "introversion" and "extraversion," which is convenient, but may be misleading. But when we come to Read's very seductive theory that the art-urge arises out of the superiority-complex of puberty, one feels inclined, after the first enthusiasm of agreement has passed, to ask for exhaustive evidence. The feeling of inferiority which causes the superiority complex arises in the family circle, according to Read. But are there, one wonders, artists whose early family life has been such as to preclude all inferiority-feelings of this kind? In Japan the child is treated far less repressively than in the West, while, on the other hand, the nepotic system that still plays so great a part in the national life, may often ensure that parental protection and parental help, which is much the same thing, will do a great deal to mitigate the severity of

the "intense conflict between instinctive desires and social control," so that of the occasions for conflict and readjustment to social codes of the kind that the English public school, or "pitchforking" the youth into the world may present, do not occur in a country which should, according to Read's argument, be less rather than more artistic, whereas there is every indication of the contrary

If the conclusions of the essay are to be accepted with caution, the search for a scientific basis for criticism is to be welcomed as a step in the direction of sanity and truth

Mr I. A. Richards is more cautious in regard to the value of psycho-analysis in the examination of art "whatever," he observes in his *Principles of Literary Criticism*, "psycho-analysts may aver, the mental processes of the poet are not a very profitable field for investigation They offer far too happy a hunting-ground for uncontrollable conjecture" His own psychological foundation for criticism is thoroughly solid He starts from the purely physical conception of the mind as the nervous system; the conscious and the unconscious are convenient fictions, retaining for the sake of comfort a

little of the old animistic superstition. Artistic creation is thus brought nearer to the physical than almost anyone, so far, has dared bring it. The impulse begins in a stimulus but the stimuli do not, many of them, take effect. "Which are received and which impulses ensue depends upon which of our interests is active, upon the general set, that is, of our activities. This is conditioned in a large degree by the state, of satisfaction or unrest, of the recurrent and persistent needs of the body." This need of the organism he calls "the state of equilibrium of its multifarious activities."

From the impulse we proceed to those that are appetencies, and thence to the determination of values which Richards considers to be, with communication, the most important matter for the attention of the critic. "Anything is valuable which will satisfy an appetency without involving the frustration of some equal or *more important* appetency." He goes on to say that "thus morals become purely prudential, and ethical codes merely the expression of the most general scheme of expediency to which an individual or a race has attained" (expediency, because the codes depend on the relative

importance of the desires to be satisfied, or not, as the case may be) The importance is "the extent of the disturbance of other impulses in the individual's actividual's which the thwarting of the impulse involves"\* The arts are "our store-house of recorded values,"—the values of the experiences of artists, which experiences represent "conciliations of impulses which in most minds are still confused, intertrammelled, and conflicting" The poet's experience, as he undergoes it (is) more than usually organised through his more than usual vigilance"

The critic must be an adept at experiencing, able to distinguish experiences from one another as regards their less superficial features, and a sound judge of values, and these things he cannot be if he is lacking in psychological knowledge, e g, "the general psychological form of the experiences with which he is concerned" The chapter in which these words occur, *The Analysis of*

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\* Herbert Read, in reviewing the book (*Criterion*, April 1926) a these definitions as being too vague and (b) his "frank acceptance of utilitarian or prudential ethics" "Mr Richards despairs of ethics without examining the possibilities of a reconstruction of that science as vital as the one he would effect in literary criticism—and one that is to be effected largely by the same psychological means."

*a Poem*, shows the critical method applied, and the defects in "rule-of-thumb" critical methods explained, such as the unadjustable view that might regard "Swinburne as "a defective kind of Hardy" by judging him, absurdly enough, in terms of Hardy, or objecting to him "on the ground of a lack of thought" The trick, exposed (I believe) for the first time, is well known, who has not come across this type of opinion, "Cowley is a sort of emasculated Donne" or "Brahms is the Browning of Music"? The last paragraph of this chapter is most suggestive We learn that the value of experience does not depend on "intensity" or the momentary excitement it induces, " it is the attitudes evoked which are the all-important part of any experience It is not the intensity of the conscious experience, its thrill, its pleasure or its poignancy which gives its value, but the organisation of its impulses for freedom and fulness of life There are plenty of ecstatic moments which are valueless "

Mr Richards is, as may be seen, a ruthless and much-needed iconoclast; ecstasy, art for art's sake, "beauty=communicative efficacy," the sacerdotal and vatic functions

of the poet,—all these and other “teraphim” are methodically demolished. Views of art and ways of critical approach have multiplied until, as he demonstrates in the first chapter, and also in the (perhaps intentionally) ironical little book, *The Foundations of Aesthetics*, a confusion of imperfect and tendentious systems has ensued. But with his psychological compass a safe course seems at last to have become a possibility and he points out prevalent fallacies and popular superstitions generously and with a lively wit.

It is clearly necessary that critics should be provided with a common starting point. Arbitrary rules, even of the “frock-coated” variety abhorrent to Mr. Douglas, are better than nothing, but natural law, if such can be verified, is of course, far more desirable. Mr. Richards has given us a little science in exchange for many beliefs, but after “boiling it down” there is less residue than one would like to see, though it is not suggested that this is his fault! His test for values as given here is negative, i. e., it depends on the effect of non-satisfaction of impulses. Is this as far as one can safely go on the data? Perhaps so, but one is reluctant (perhaps because of some masked and

lingering superstition) to accept so unsatisfying an importance as the ultimate importance

In a more recent and all too brief work on practically the same subject (*Science and Poetry*, Kegan Paul 1926), the chapter 'What is Valuable?' throws further and kindly light upon the layman's darkness. When he quotes "the Gods approve the depth and not the tumult of the soul" he is admitting, we may take it, that the depth is more important (in the sense referred to) than the tumult, his comment on the lines, which I quote with my own italics, seems to confirm that he does. "the interests must come into play with *as little conflict among themselves as possible*" In other words, the experience must be organised so as to "give all the impulses the *greatest possible degree of freedom*" A cross-reference to *Foundations of Aesthetics*\* makes the position taken up even up even plainer and more positive. Turning to pp 74 ff., (Synaesthesia) we find that, as we may have suspected, this "depth through freedom" implies "an

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\* The 'model' theory set out in the *Foundations* reveals the influence of the Confucian writings, and in the book there are quotations from the Doctrine of the Mean (中庸), viz, the introductory definitions and the last two paragraphs of Chap I.

aesthetic state in which impulses are experienced together," a condition of equilibrium in which "the impulses active, sustain one state of mind"

The main purpose of the book (*Science and Poetry*) is to show how poetry may justify its existence at a period when science is destroying belief. This cannot be done by making poetry the vehicle of scientific teaching, since "thought" is not the essence of poetry, nor can it be considered as an expression of the truth, which it apprehends intuitively, but which science apprehends through reason. It has other functions. While science uses the statement, poetry uses the "pseudo-statement" "which is justified entirely by its effect in releasing or organising our impulses and attitudes. . ." Humanity needs the pseudo-statement for purposes of mental hygiene, but whereas in the past it has been usual to believe in them (e g, in those of religion) the time has now come when belief is threatened. But this does not necessarily imply the destruction of poetry, on the contrary, it is poetry's chance. "The remedy. . . is to cut our pseudo-statements free from belief, and yet retain them, in this released state, as instruments



by which we order our attitudes to one another and to the world ”

Mr Richards revolutionises both criticism and the function of poetry—of art, in fact, if he can do this, with psychology, as he admits, in its infancy, in what state will aesthetics be, allowing for an even violent but passing anti-scientific reaction, in another century ?

Mr T Sturge Moore was already a figure in the “nineties,” when with Laurence Binyon, his elder by a year, and others of that generation, he was making his poetic reputation, and as well, was producing woodcuts ‘to illustrate contemporary books. The chief reason why he should be included in so limited a sketch as this is that, as a theorist of art and poetry, he is contributing something of importance toward the present search for truth and value. Some of his latest utterances deserve the closest study. This, for instance\* vindicates the epic, and the fully-organised poem carried out to its logical end, and Lucretius and his like, “He who taught that literature should aspire

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\* Cf also *Outlines of a Philosophy of Art*, by R G Collingwood, I, 4 (Humphrey Milford)

towards the condition of music had perceived a very partial truth, and is the father of that eccentricity which regards "Khubla Khan" as the *nec plus ultra* of poetry. Unattached fragments of verse must always lack those major relations which organic incorporation confers, therefore conditions for the existence of *supreme eloquence*" (I have italicised these words) "only occur in highly composite works"

The first of two other pregnant quotations deals in a very plain-spoken manner with the burning question of the moment, "Intelligibility is the purpose of language, therefore reason must be the central virtue of literature." The "divine madness" of the artist must not be the ruling element, but must be relative to reason

The second should be examined in the light of E M Forster's *Anonymity*. As it raises the question of the artist's personality as an obtrusion upon beauty, "the work of art is not. an expression of some experience or emotion existing independently, much less is it an impression transferred from external appearances, such views only dominate the artist in so far as he fails to create a sufficiently complex and harmonious

object" (he refers more than once to harmony and the harmonious poise of the soul,—Cf *The Foundations of Aesthetics*. XIV *Synaesthesia*, & foll pp,) "—by short-coming alone can his work betray his personality, his unnecessary likes and dislikes, all his meanness" It will be seen that he has touched dexterously, evocatively, on several favourite and typical formulae of the "moderns"; but his grouping of them presents yet another aspect of the general problem of mental creation One inference may be that Reason originates in the "super-personal" or unbiassed soul,—there is no doubt about it, in fact, it must be so, if the framework of his argument, as a figurative truth, is to be accepted But a doubt arises similar to that suggested by Mr Forster's contention, a doubt as to the reliability of his estimation, and what appears to be his definition, of the personality and its place in art It need scarcely be added that the use of words like "soul,"\* in these times when the connotation of church doctrines has broken down increases unnecessarily the difficulties of the reader

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\* Elsewhere he uses the term "psyche."

IV *a* (The Vorticist attitude)

As far back as June 1914 appeared the first number of *Blast*, the "review of the Great English Vortex," edited by Wyndham Lewis. It appeared to be the work of very young men, but its manifesto was signed by (amongst others) Lawrence Atkinson. The manifesto revealed an anti-romantic attitude and, curiously enough, emphasised at the same time the essentially primitive character of the art-instinct,—for the two ideas are not interdependent. From the very tenable premiss that "the art-instinct is permanently primitive" the manifesto moves to the more dubious position at which the artist is regarded as "a savage (in no sense an "advanced," perfected democratic, Futurist individual of Mr Marinetti's limited imagination). The citation of Marinetti—whose art is now universally admitted to be based on unsound principles, as an unwilling witness for the prosecution, is clever, but it does not prove that because the art-instinct is as primitive as the hunger-instinct, the artist and the hungry man are both necessarily savages.

The English spirit is next defined, the sea, the mysticism and madness of the North,

mechanical inventiveness, and vulgarity, are important ingredients in the English "world," from whose "heavy stagnant pools of Saxon blood" a movement "towards art and imagination" might spring into being. But alas! twelve years have elapsed, and the great artistic age is still, as far as we can tell, upon the threshold of birth. The vorticist movement, though deserving of more praise than Mr. Clive Bell would grant it, has certainly not electrified the world; possibly because post-war conditions have been so unfavourable to all artistic ventures, but it may be also that it does not provide a satisfactory formula for liberating the pent-up creative energy of British artists. But it does represent part of a large movement, the end of which is not yet in sight, —a movement away from naturalism towards various but more or less abstract goals.

*The Caliph's Design* (1919) presents a more matured Wyndham Lewis, and a modification and amplification of some of the the *Blast* aphorisms. Thus, " 'the artist' was formerly indentified with the savage . , " but "it is only since a variety of more adventurous men have pushed out beyond this sententious belt of savage life into

lonelier regions, that a new type of "artist" has been met with" But one of the most valuable functions of the book is to collect and destroy (as it were so much refuse) a number of "emotional"\* approaches to art, such as the cult of the "quaint," the "amusing," or the recent worship of Dostoievski, who "has the blemish of being sometimes altogether too "Russian" to be bearable, too epileptic and heavy-souled" His own statement is certainly emotive as it stands, it is true, yet it is based on the acceptable probability that neural abnormality will affect the creative processes, in every phase of the artist who suffers from it It is these shallowly "emotional" currents that manifest themselves as fashions, which he compares with patent aperient medicines, useful in stimulating "the fifth rate, to correct the stagnations that are perpetually gathering where life is poor and inactive" The fashion-follower is restricted by the age, and to the revolution of the moment, but the competent critic, if he can reach Mr Lewis's standard will "gaze at a number of revolutions at once, and catch the

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\* The word is not used absolutely

static and unvarying eye of Aristotle .” From hence he is able to deploy his forces toward the objective of a “pluralist” art

The average amateur aesthetician has only room for a single idea at a time, “So you get the cry against tradition, the cry against emotion, or against superstition, or against science Men’s consciousness can only grasp one of these ideas at a time. .” But they remain, at each change of direction as far from reality as ever “And to find that,” says Mr Lewis ‘pluralistically,’ “you must watch for some happy blending of the vitality of “Romance,” the coldness of “science,” and the moderation and cohesion of a “classical” mind” Certain ‘anti-emotional’ tendencies visible in the *Criterion* may be re-examined in the light of these remarks, and the earlier stand of *Blast* against romance as well, but it still emerges that “emotional” criticism is the immediate reaction to a like or dislike, and thus may continue to be distinguished from more reasoned judgments into which, nevertheless, emotion inevitably enters The man who “is above Fashion” is indubitably the man whose judgments are of the latter kind, while the emotion-intellect controversy has been for many the clash of two

exclusive, single and irreconcilable ideas

This year (1927) has brought to admirers of Mr Lewis and lovers of Elizabethan literature *The Lion and the Fox* (Grant Richards), to the significance of which many factors contribute, and two in particular. Firstly the author is here seen at a stage well in advance of that of the crude Vorticist tyro, he has matured, grown in wisdom, progressed in the craft of wielding his hammer, leaving the Village Blacksmith for Benvenuto Cellini. Secondly, the book breathes the choicest winds of modern doctrine, and so appeals to and expresses a certain type of mind that is, one hopes, now on the increase, the type that attempts *inter alia* to approach literature from a scientific basis, the type that will find, perhaps, a new Bible in *The Golden Bough*. Mr Lewis, far-travelled in the terrains of Anthropology, History, and with more than a nodding acquaintance with Economics, supplies the prototype, a figure complementary, one might say, to that of another modernist prototype, Mr Richards, with his psychological approach to criticism. This double exemplar before him, the amateur who relies for valuation merely on his vague



taste for "the beautiful" or for "art" will be deprived of his last excuse for mental indolence

The thesis of this work is the tracing of two elements that preoccupied, variously disguised, Shakespeare and Elizabethan dramatists generally,—or at least the claim for this preoccupation is made upon very good grounds, the Fox-Machiavelli element (e g, Iago), and the Lion-Colossus element (e g, Othello,) the slayer and the slain, the king-god who must be slaughtered and the carnifex \* He exposes Shakespeare in the rôle of the carnifex, but modifying the possible view that Shakespeare himself was a pure Machiavellist, compassing by treachery the fall of the illustrious, when he claims that he was not on the side of Othello's vulpine destroyer "If most critics have tried to make of Iago a colossus, to match Othello, I do not think Shakespeare ever did" He is not the sacerdotal destroyer, hedged with divinity as one set apart and sanctioned, but is "rather like those hangmen

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\* It is only fair to remind the reader of Macaulay's essay on Machiavelli, and especially of the passage in which he suggests that while Othello may be a hero in England, Iago would possibly have been preferred by an Italian audience in the fifteenth century

who when not engaged in their terrible trade are grocers or barbers . . .”

In the process of building up this conception of Shakespeare and of the age, he throws down several popular graven images ; notably the sweet “fancy’s child” and the romance of the adventures by sea. Guided by Mr Lewis, we may begin to question whether Milton had read or understood *Troilus and Cressida* and *Timon*, those disconcertingly bitter creations, and we view, stripped of their glamour, the sea-rovers of the age, exposed as a truculent kind of grocer’s assistant. In passing, Mr Lewis succeeds in delivering blows right and left at figures that have come to be worshipped as authorities, Swinburne, Vernon Lee, Professor Bradley, Mathew Arnold, go down before him one after the other. It is an imposing tilt at windmills. The puritan sense of sin is found to be lurking, not only in Swinburne, but in Wilde and all his company ; - but the most piquant of the revelations is that of the Celtic “fallacy.” Of course the existence of the little Mediterranean or “Iberian” man, skilled in arts and crafts, before the Celt, is known to many if not to all, but here, reading

between the lines, we may imagine the "colossus" Celtic type, the conqueror, being subdued intellectually by the cunning Iberian "Iagos," those little men, who, some have told us, will one day inherit the earth

*The Lion and the Fox* is avowedly tendentious, and so we must expect a stressing of those points that support the case, e g, the debt to Italy, and we must expect other points to be suppressed. Thus we are told that the heroic Tudor drama was attached to no great tradition, but sprang up accidentally, but immediately several traditions leap into one's mind, the "Garnier-Senecan" tradition, and the tradition of the mediaeval stage which, though weaker in England than in France at the time, cannot be ignored. There is something of Herod in Coriolanus. Lastly,—a minor point,—we are told that "the whole structure of" celtic twilight "and racial romance is really the work of the Irish; the Welsh and Scotch have little to do with it." Here again, something is suppressed, the myths of "Welsh wizards" about Kai or Bedwyr, the embroideries of Geoffrey of Monmouth and Wace. Nevertheless, Mr Lewis has proved himself a scholar as well as a pugilist,—as a

'modern' should be; and the full ripeness should appear in his next book

#### IV. *b.*

Several other theorists require attention Mr Middleton Murry is a good representative of the school, if there is such a school, that sets a very formidable barrier between "emotion" and "intellect," and holds that "the meditation of a writer is, in spite of all analogies, different in kind from the meditation of the philosopher and the scientist" He claims that this is true even in Lucretius and Dante, but advances his conviction as a reason But when we are told that a "great creative writer does not 'criticise' life, for criticism is a predominantly intellectual activity," it is time for anyone who prefers a less rigidly compartmental view to part company with him

To Mr Murry style means "the precise communication of emotion and thought", and that requires the finding of "some symbol which will evoke in (the reader) an emotional reaction as nearly as possible identical with the emotion (the author) is feeling" The process of formulation and selection necessary to this preciseness, he calls "crystallisation", and a metaphor,

being "the result of the search for a precise epithet" is, as it were, a 'crystal' There is some truth in this, inasfar as the metaphor often contributes something that is essential to complete expression, and is therefore an essential part of the total crystallisation But there is more to the metaphor than that (see Richards' *Principles*, p 240)

Our suspicion that Mr Murry\* is on the track of the generic superiority and divinity of the poet becomes a certainty when we come across remarks of this kind "the great writer has to carry the articulation of the material world into the world of the spirit ; he has to define the indefinable," or " ... the poet . utters secrets which the language of Logic and Science and the converse of everyday were never designed to bear " I must again refer to Richards, (p. 78) "the world of poetry has in no sense any different reality from the rest of the world and it has no special laws and no other-worldly peculiarities " As against this, Mr. Murry is clearly on the side of the mystagogues

Lascelles Abercrombie is not innocent of mystagogic practices ; he tells of 'enchant-

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\* *The Problem of Style* (Milford) 1922.

ment,' of 'incantation,' of the 'magic' of poetry; words plainly used to produce an effect similar to the preparatory "mumbo-jumbo" in *Back to Methuselah*, when the oracle was just about to begin. Yet he lays down some laws which in themselves are commendable, when however he comes to apply them some apprehension of a flaw arises. Thus, in *The Idea of Great Poetry*,\* there is an edifying discussion of the greatness of form is, he tells us, "the fore-ordained and finally resulting whole impression" (why impression, by the way?) "which sums up and includes an orderly sequence of contributory impressions," and it is "here, if anywhere, that . . . greatness will reside." Shortly afterwards he quotes Allingham's

Four ducks on a pond,  
A grass bank beyond etc

which is not taken as instance in which "greatness" is absent from the "organised accumulation of the whole series of momentary impressions." True poetry, (poetry, presumably containing the element of greatness, i e, "so concentrated and

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\* Secker, 1925

organised as to effect an unusual richness and intensity of impression") is "some revelation of the ideal world, which is the world of universal desire,"—another other-worldly poetic world, in fact, strongly suggesting the world of phantasy. Greatness itself is "an unusual range and variety of experiences transmuted into a version of the ideal world—the world of things known and felt in perfect and satisfying significance," which is not, as he admits by the previous definition, the world of actuality. He continues; "there are two main moods, very different in kind, which may urge us thus to idealise our experience of life, to exalt the things of this world into the condition of a more desirable world ...". The poetic satisfactions of these two moods are, the poetry of "refuge" and of "interpretation". Thus we reach, viâ the "other-worldliness" of poetry, a conception of refuge and interpretation not far removed, surely from the repression and flight for relief to phantasy, and the sublimation process of psychoanalysis, "devices" Richards calls them, "by which we endeavour to avoid issues that might bewilder us". As we follow Abercrombie's argument,

it becomes clear that the virtue of the interpretation lies in the fact that it helps us, in its way, dodge the issue. The latter type of poetry possesses "the greatness of the scope of its unifying harmony," i. e., an interpretation that renders it no longer necessary to face a truth in all its horror, for the discord and the horror vanish together. The "greatness" is thus reduced to a certain expediency, the scope of unifying harmony, the scope of explaining away. This may be greatness, but surely *a* greatness and not *all* greatness in poetry. Professor Abercrombie seems to take a rather too partial or particularised a view of generalities, if he is enthusiastic over *Peter Bell*, there is all the more reason why he should consider the Heroic Drama.

He succeeds in dealing with psychological issues without committing himself too far through the use of technical jargon; but Robert Graves introduces into mildly psychological and anthropological speculations all the cosy and chatty brightness of the fireside discussion. Instead of lecturing us from the rostrum he prattles wisdom at us from an easy chair. There is no room in this summary to discuss what is evidently a



he names "mere verse." Satire and Didactic verse, he seems to believe, partake of this kind of badness to the extent of 99%, and Lucretius seldom passes from "mere verse" to poetry. There is clearly something amiss here, and the statement that in satire and didactic verse "there is no conflict and therefore no poetry" requires the closest examination. The particular kind of conflict which, to Mr Graves means poetry, — the goodness opposed to his three badnesses, must be something too narrow and specialised to form a proper foundation; his idea of "a battle of the great emotions" needs a great deal of exploration and testing, it cannot be hurled at us as a dogmatic missile.

A notable addition was made to modern Poetic when Professor H W Garrod delivered his inaugural lecture on *The Profession of Poetry* (Clarendon Press 1924) at Oxford, on taking the chair of Poetry at that university. The position he assumes is of great interest, but may be challenged, since he seems to combine a pleasure-theory with an ethical theory. It depends exactly upon what he means by "pleasure," and whether he regards it as a means or an

incident or by-product. But since he insists on the "hold in ethics," and since he points out that the teaching (or salutary effect) of poetry is not in its preaching, — a view evidently shared by Herbert Read (cf *The Nature of Metaphysical Poetry*), one may perhaps be satisfied that he is not misled as to the place and nature of pleasure. In which case there is no need for him to apologise for holding "stick-in-the-mud" theories of poetry, nor for supporting Arnold's statement that poetry is a criticism of life.

From this starting-point he proceeds to an examination of modern poetry, or rather those aspects of it that were plainest in the year 1924. for it is clear from his remarks on language and rhythm that other aspects were at this time less noticeable. He finds, for example, that "its language affects extreme plainness;" and this is true, as we have seen of a large section of persons who are still working on a kind of perverted Wordsworthian principle, consciously or otherwise. But when he confesses "to a sneaking liking for what great poets have decried, 'poetic diction,'" he seems to be unaware of the advances in this direction

that have been made since the early days of Georgianism and imagism, and that while Roy Campbell has borrowed something from the eighteenth century that must be highly obnoxious to the 'purists,' e g ,

Far be the bookish Muses' let them find  
Poets more spruce, and with pale fingers wind  
The bays in garlands for their northern kind ,

others are producing a newer diction which is unmistakably a language of poetry and not of prose, and must certainly be acquitted of "extreme plainness" Thus Sacheverell Sitwell writes

In hyphenated lightning  
The hoardings hammer a small word of hope  
Upon the motionless wide sky

However, the fact remains that the "anti-diction" party is still formidable, and Professor Garrod's reinforcement comes timely on the opposite side. He strengthens his case by adding that the difference between the language of poetry and that of prose is a difference, simply, of poetry, and by warning us that "custom lies upon us like a weight," and that poetry, whose function is to lift that weight, must avoid this

deadness in language as in other things.

In considering rhythm, he realises that complexity must necessarily take the place of "lilt" in these times of a more complex life, since poetry is an expression of life; yet he does not seem fully to appreciate the fact that the dying out of the "the lilt of the soul," which is presumably a more primitive sort of music than the less obvious rhythms echoed, (shall we say?) in certain kinds of "free" verse, need not be a matter for regret. But it would be regrettable if the mature rhythms were not so good of their kind, i e, were not so adequately expressive of modern or relatively mature life, as the youthful lilt was of the more youthful life. And one is bound to admit that a good deal of "free verse" possesses comparatively 'ignoble' rhythms, a good deal, but certainly not all, but there is no ground for inferring from this that modern life is more ignoble than that for example of the 16th century.

The function of the poet then is to express life, bardically, prophetically, but not merely by the light of nature. "I am . . . disposed to believe that poetry might be made better by an increased attention to the

theory of it" The same thing has been put very strongly by Aldous Huxley in his essay on Jonson in *On the Margin*, and is an article of faith with most poets of the Left today. He advances a formula based on Aristotle,—which again, is symptomatic of the trend of contemporary thought. Poetry should present life; but "in such a manner to eliminate what is unrelated, inorganic," and as "a whole of which all the parts are seen to be co-operative."

But from this point he proceeds to the sensationalist theories that served as a foundation for the Romantic Revival, letting them off with far too easy a cross-examination. He seems to accept the view that the natural purity of the senses is the poet's chief requisite, without enquiring urgently enough about faculties of selection, organisation, and co-ordination, and to stress almost unduly the high office of the bard. It is high, indeed, but so is that of the physician. He might have demonstrated that in practice the making of "familiar objects to be as though they were not familiar," when carried out by poets with presumably pure senses (and presumably little else) has resulted not in the elimination, but in the

obtrusion, of the unessential.

The soldiers raced,  
 Breathless,  
 And each one of them,  
 To make a mimic bayonet,  
 Had thrust a spring of living, flaming gorse,  
 Into his rifle's mouth \*

There are, in fact, omissions, the amendment of which would have enhanced the value, considerable as it is, of this admirable pamphlet

As a critic of critics Professor Garrod demands a high standard, as may be seen from various passages in his book on Keats (Clarendon Press, 1926) His trenchant arraignment of Miss Lowell is a locus classicus for modern polemic, we have here some hard hitting, but strictly according to Queensberry rules If there is any point in the chapter in question that needs further elucidation, it is that which arises out of his censure of her psycho-analytics Is it the application of psychoanalysis to criticism in general, or her mishandling of it that offends him most? One might expect his attitude to be that psychoanalysis in its present stage

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\* R Holman, *The Charge* (Chapbook, 1919)

requires to be used with the utmost caution in literary criticism, but that such use is not necessarily excluded where critics are sufficiently expert, when however they are inexpert, as he shows Miss Lowell to be, it is clearly excluded. But such a phrase as "the dross of psychoanalysis" suggests though it does not prove that he may disapprove altogether of this intrusion of psychoanalysis.

Miss Lowell's chief fault is one commonly found among the now discredited critics of gossip, and one that he aptly describes as "a prolixity of the imagination"; In her hands Keats's passport becomes a document of overpowering significance.

In the same book a little more light is thrown upon Professor Garrod's attitude to the romantic sensation views. We hear for the first time of "a beauty which is beyond the senses"; this on the one hand, and on the other a definite espousal of the romantic cause, apropos of the "regress upon the supernatural". This meant, according to Professor Garrod, the liberation of the poet from the idea of "imitating nature," and his rehabilitation as a creator, which is almost saying that poets nurtured in the

Renaissance doctrine were not creators, or were less so than the romantics. The supernatural has, surely, a greater value in poetry as mythology; since as such it is a comment on the spirit of man and on his historic view of the universe. It increases the range of image and symbol, and the means of imparting beauty, but to say that without it the poet is no creator seems to indicate a somewhat crabbed notion of what a poet is. But Professor Garrod does not say so in so many words.

#### IV c

Reference to F. S. Flint and the late T. E. Hulme\* will take us back to the beginnings of Imagism, it appears that the ideas of the latter impressed very strongly the Imagist poets, and that Hulme was the inventor of the term, or rather of the special sense of the term, "image," as a more satisfactory unit of expression than the protean *word*. Words for him were lacking in reality in themselves, and he, like the school that followed him, distrusted rhetoric. His influence,—we can see it at work in the poems of Flint and other Imagists, resulted

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\* *Speculations* (Kegan Paul) was published posthumously a few years ago. Hulme was killed in France in 1917.



in the creative diffidence which, as has been already noticed, was the major fault, or disease, of Imagism. His view of the creative process in Poetry may be compared with Mr Murry's crystallisation theory, as the poetic theme develops, new and unexpected beauties present themselves, (yet another way of describing a familiar happening in the mind )

There is much matter in *Speculations* that may be applied to the precept and practice of letters, though, taken as a whole, the book embraces a wider terrain, treating of more general aesthetic and philosophic questions. But the essay on Romanticism and Classicism should be missed neither by critic nor poet. It is a challenge, couched in the peculiarly direct and racy language of which Hulme was a master. But it can scarcely be called a cool and considered statement of the case, inasfar as he betrays symptoms of being about to lose his temper at moments, now with Pope, now with the romantic poets; he may thus commit himself to occasional arrogances, but they are so trenchantly put, they are such invigorating morsels of *panache*, that their excision would have been a sad loss to the general gusto of

this admirable piece of prose Besides, at the time when it was written the anti-romantic party were sorely in need of a strong champion, and protests of this kind quite in season

"I object even to the best romantics I object still more to the receptive attitude I object to the sloppiness which doesn't consider that a poem is a poem unless it is moaning or whining about something or other" A good definition, we think of the later stage of Masfield with its yearning ("moaning or whining") after Beauty On the other hand, while Hulme correctly prognosticated a recrudescence of classicism in poetry, "dry hard verse," something, no doubt, like the now obsolete Images of the group who owed so much to his teaching, he was annoyed with the formalism, the quintessential "papistic" quality of Pope, "which pleased his friends," but "which we detest" He seems to maintain that this formalism is due to insufficient vitality; yet curiously enough, so vital a poet as Roy Campbell has, since Hulme's time, made good use of the very line, with its middle caesura, which is associated with Pope.

His bold attempt to capture Shakespeare

for the Classics will probably be declared abortive by many, and his own grasp on the captive is not so sure but that he must hastily bind him with the variety of classicism that he calls the dynamic, as opposed to the static, but there is certainly elsewhere in the book (cf *Humanism*) an implication that the static and discontinuous is for him the *true* basis of *true* classicism, since in opposition to it, humanism-continuity proceeds toward Rousseau, and from him toward Romanticism.

Again he finds that the word "lads" in the famous lyric from *Cymbeline*, is a fair test for classicism. To refute this one has but to quote from an early and altogether romantic poem by Geoffrey Dennis (in *Oxford Poetry 1910-1913*)

The lad I bring this song for,  
The lad who once loved me

He writes many things, in fact, which may be questioned, or which, unless taken strictly in the proper sense, may prove to be dangerous, this for instance "it is essential to prove that beauty is in small dry things." Again, one recalls the errors into which the Imagists sometimes fell.

But *Speculations* abounds in brilliant and

health-giving polemic ; and the reader must not leave out of account that less than ten years ago there was a good deal more antipathy between Romantic and Classic than there is today, when signs of an attempt at Classicised romanticism, or Classicism romantised in spite of itself, (*vide* the discussion of Mr Cazamian's remarks, p 229) and perhaps accepted as such for an art-medium, may be discerned

Hulme, had he lived, would no doubt have proved to be a thinker on a larger scale, and would have greatly strengthened the hand of the school that, on a classical basis, is seeking to construct a culture of a far more balanced kind than the kinetic varieties of the nineteenth century

Both Hulme and Flint insist on clarity, the hard outline, the excision of any extraneous, "silly ornament" "There are very few," says Flint, "with personality enough to give body to art There are many who are clever enough to rig out their shortcomings with fine-sounding words and phrases" Rhyme, he adds, a little rashly, is "a nuisance to the ear of a reader educated to appreciate the essential qualities of poetry" This kind of critical curiosity dates back to

the 16th century, and is interesting to the historian with a taste for psychology. But Flint is right in advocating, as a general counsel to beginners, the avoidance of clichés and stereotyped language, and Hulme, in demanding new images of the creator. It is expedient to say these things, but the result is likely to be the creation, not of something new, but of something individual, and this kind of "newness" can be imparted to stereotyped images, and does not *necessarily* require new images. But the attitude to language of Hulme and Flint suggests that they did not take this view.

Mr Flint is scrupulously honest, but rather brusquely dogmatic, in his dealings with other authors; he loses no time in finding Mr Squire guilty of "lack of artistic cohesion, lack of poetic rhythm" (which may be questioned), and clumsiness, and in forcing H D down our throats, so, at least, he did in 1920. He can also chastise the reading public and the ordinary reviewer with nearly as many scorpions as Mr Lewis. Of the reviewer he writes, "It must be confessed that our critics are for the most part suburban, with the astonishing myopia that can only see things near at hand", and of the public

in regard to their attitude to Mr Aldington, "it is amusing to see the wonder of the yokels that one small head should know much . . ."

The book apropos of which these remarks were made, was Mr Aldington's *Literary Studies and Reviews*, published in 1924 \* Ranging through five centuries, from Ronsard to James Joyce, it covers ground both familiar and unfamiliar to the majority of the reading public

Mr Flint, writing ardently for the defence, discovers the end of the book to be "the illumination of the epicurean philosophy in literature" While admiring the readiness of this act of championship, the present writer is not prepared to perform the *macabre* feat of "swallowing it in cold blood" More may be granted than that there is a link (as Flint demonstrates) between the essay on Cowley and the French epicureans and "Theocritus in Capri"; in the essay on Rémy de Gourmont, for instance, this connexion may be found de Gourmont has knowledge of Lucretius—Lucretius—Epicurus In "Landor's Hellenics" there is a passing

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\* Allen and Unwin.

reference to Epicurus, and there is the "Saint-Evremond" But what is the link with Eliot? Is it by any chance "Eliot in the tradition which also harbours Saint-Amant—Saint-Evremond knew of Saint-Amant, and also of Epicurus?" While, with regard to Mr Joyce, one could think out an even more fantastic connecting-chain, including a comparison of Epicureanism with the views of Mirbeau and the Naturalistes, and also of Odo of Cluny!

The Epicurus-unity is not establishable for the whole book, but it goes to establish what is surely the true nexus—the expression of that gracious Hellenistic\* sanity, which beautifies Mr Aldington's verse and prose, and may be said to be characteristic of him. It may be seen in his treatment of James Joyce, as can be judged from the following sentences, "the tendency of modern literature—I mean the experimental, non-commercial kind—is toward vulgarity and incoherence and away from distinction and sobriety," and "Mr Joyce with his great undisciplined talent is more dangerous than a shipload of Dadaists. If we could only

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\* "Hellenistic" here=pertaining to "Hellenism" the word is not used in the 'art' sense

treat" (him) "as Plato recommends, give him praise and anoint him with oil and put a crown of purple on his head and send him into another country" In "The Poet and his Age" he laments the lack of '*ordonnance*' in contemporary verse; in discussing Mr Eliot he takes care to trace his pedigree not only to the goliards but to the "stately, subtle-minded Englishmen of the Renaissance" A quantity of examples might be quoted in support of this 'classicising' unity

The name of Virginia Woolf will be associated, no doubt, by many amateurs of modern letters with the goodly fellowship of the *Criterion* M Cazamian\* is inclined to group these and other moderns all together, —rather undiscerningly, though his general conclusions may certainly apply to certain groups or individuals within his more arbitrary group He alludes to "les caractères des écrivains les plus significatifs . —un James Joyce, une Virginia Woolf, une Dorothy Richardson, une Rose Macaulay, une Rebecca West, un Edward Morgan Forster, un Richard Aldington, un F S

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\* *Histoire de la Littérature Anglaise* (Hachette 1924)



Flint, la rencontre . . d'une critique ironique et volontiers sèche, et de la discontinuité impressionniste dans la présentation du réel'' This is a little sweeping as it stands and a fairly close examination of Mrs Woolf's *The Common Reader* (Hogarth Press, 1925) will reveal that her criticism is different in its nature from that of the more controversial and theoretic group (itself by no means compact) in which two other of M Cazamian's instances, Aldington and Flint, may be included She is essentially the spectator of letters through life, as a critic pithily observed, "she interprets art in terms of men and women She never willingly accepts any impersonal standards of aesthetic value" Without being a disciple of Sir Edmund Gosse she stands a few points nearer to him than do the servants of psychological aesthetic, by reason of her keen and even dominant interest in personality This characteristic enables her, like Norman Douglas, to devote some time to "The Lives of the Obscure; "for one likes romantically to feel oneself a deliverer advancing with lights across the waste of years to the deliverance of some stranded ghost—" But she is acutely vigilant, and succeeds in

intimating that she is well aware of underlying principles, a perusal of Addison will "show that we have lost the art of writing essays What with our views and our virtues, our passions and profundities " A reconnaissance of the English position before Russian fiction, again, yields some useful information "the "soul" is alien to him" (i.e., the Englishman) "It is even antipathetic It has little sense of humour and no sense of comedy It is formless It has slight connection with the intellect It is confused, diffuse, tumultuous, incapable, it seems, of submitting to the control of logic or the discipline of poetry" There is much to read between these lines Mrs Woolf's writings cannot be called (in M Cazamian's words) "*la littérature discontinue*" which "*est intellectuelle, et souvent froid*" It is intellectual and at the same time emotive; it is ironic while it is attached to life But of course, it is improbable that M Cazamian, at the time of writing, had read more than some of her fiction and a few of her essays, which were not published in book form till 1925

But it is interesting, in view of these preceding considerations, to have met with

an analysis of the character-construction in her novels, by E. M. Forster. Do her characters live? he inquires, and replies "I feel that they live, but not continuously, whereas the characters of Tolstoy (let us say) live continuously. Jacob in *Jacob's Room* is discontinuous, demanding—and obtaining—separate approval for what he does." But he goes on to suggest that there is more "continuity" in *Mrs Dalloway*. Cazamian was, of course, applying this term to a wider field than that of characterisation in fiction.

E. M. Forster, by virtue of his stimulating *Anonymity, an Enquiry*, should perhaps have been placed in this book before the less classifiable Mrs Woolf, as he is nothing (in that essay) if not controversial; but his present introduction as a critic of her fiction keeps him at least within the main section. He sets up, at the beginning of this critique\* an Aunt Sally, "Mrs Woolf is a talented but impressionistic writer, with little feeling for form and none for actuality," which he then proceeds to bombard. She sees beautifully; and the quotations he takes to

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\* *The Novels of Virginia Woolf* (*Criterion* April, 1916)

re-inforce the declaration seem to prove that she is not impressionist (e g, "churches, like shapes of grey paper," "pails flung water in beautiful hollow shapes as of polished tortoise-shell") But "her vision is only the frontier of her kingdom Behind it lie other treasures, in particular the mind" He keeps steadfastly to the track of the intellect, which is clearly, for him, supremely important—so much so that he warns us that her work "is not mystic, not romantic, not explanatory of the universe" Her 'mission,' if any, is to alter the form of the novel, to "do away with the sense of pacing (the traditional "portrait-gallery" of previous English fiction) "under the conditions of time and space that regulate (the reader's) daily life" and to set up in place of the portrait-gallery "something more rhyth-mical" Mr Forster, it can be seen, is using no technical terms here—a few indeed, would be helpful—but is speaking in metaphors, if not in parables But he confesses, and who does not?—to finding Mrs Woolf elusive

It will be noticed that he dwells on her individual beauties as an artist "visual sensitiveness becomes in her case a productive

force    How beautifully she sees! ” “ . to convey the actual process of thinking is a creative feat, and I know of no one except Virginia Woolf who has accomplished it ” How does this square with the position occupied in that brilliant and ironic essay on Anonymity ?\* That position might be said to be a perch on the edge of the Cliff of Intellect, dizzily overhanging the Abyss of Mysticism    Telescoped, the argument might run creative art is impersonal, it is the voice of the god heard in the (presumably passive and properly anonymous) sacred oak    The oak (=author) has a surface personality which he forgets while speaking the divine words from the depths    The signature, the name, belongs to the surface personality, it is a ticket, not the spirit of life    Therefore, creations partaking of the spirit of life should remain anonymous    Q E D

It is most intriguing ; it is the kind of theory that one would dearly like to accept in a religious spirit    But objections at once begin to present themselves    For one thing, it is necessary for him, taking this stand, to exclaim of Lamb and Stevenson, “ they know

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\* The Hogarth Press.

you not, ye heavenly powers "; they are not creative artists they write only with the surface personality And he denies that we should ever say "how like Shakespeare!" Someone will immediately rise "in the body of the hall" to protest that without ever having known of Shakespeare or Marlowe he could have 'spotted' that "Holla, ye pamper'd jades of Asia!" and "old Gaunt indeed, and gaunt in being old" were written by two different men, but Mr Forster could always urge that the authors were at these moments writing with their surface personalities But are Lamb and Stevenson barred irrevocably out of the creative paradise? And they on the same plane—*both* surface-writers and nothing more?

We become interested in the writer's personality after we have read his books and "the glamour of creation is over" Now comes the moment for Mr Eliot to tender us Shakespeare's laundry-bills But a stone has been cast which may hit Mr Eliot Those personal details imply study, and "study is only a serious form of gossip" In pictorial art the study of personality and its importance cannot be thus laughed away, the lens reveals characteristic brush-strokes

that make it clear that the 'divine voice' can only be completely uttered when it is mingled "chemically," and not "mechanically" (to be reckless with the metaphors) with the personality. It is true that the latter has been emphasised at the expense of the former, but the remedy is not to deny that this latter has any part in true artistic creation. The act of creation is not complete until the "surface" has become suffused with the "depth." Indeed the separation of the two in this cavalier Forsterian fashion seems to be, on reflection, a questionable proceeding. But if it is not and they are regarded as two separates, Mr Forster is undone by his shrinking from this duality, (and how much more would he not shrink from plurality?) Another debatable point is his duality! He demands one world for poetry "which is not this world" whose "laws are not the laws of science or logic;" and another for truth, usefulness, science, etc. This runs counter to another "modernist" theory (see Richards, above). In fact Mr Forster is kicking splendidly and audaciously against the pricks; or is he merely and by an elaborate practical joke, drawing attention to the

too little realised importance of the 'impersonal'? If he is consciously a devil's advocate, he has done his work too well. But it still remains for the other party to deny point-blank that the creative process is remotely like his dipping a bucket into the divine well. "That kind of thing" they might say, "does not happen at all; Mr Forster is carried away on the deluding wings of his own metaphor." At all events the essay is the challenge of an intellectual who will force a reply.

#### VI (*Additional notes and conclusion*)

A third group with its literary organ, less strongly characterised than the "Squirearchy" or the *Criterion* junto, is that of the *Calendar*, an excellent monthly, but disappointing to the tendency hunter because it is so miscellaneous as to include, at one time the verse of W J Turner, and at another, an article by Wyndham Lewis. Its reviewing staff, comprising Edgell Rickward, Bertram Higgins, Edwin Muir, Douglas Garman, and others, has scarcely the weight and range of the "all big gun" batteries of the *Criterion*, where Eliot, Read, Bonamy Dobree (a dramatic critic of recent but solid reputation,) Humbert Wolfe, and



others can put up at any moment an imposing barrage. But it has served a useful purpose in acting as an overflow receiver for the energy of some of the *Criterion* set, such as Lewis, or E. M. Forster, and in providing a type of reading matter that is not so exacting, taken as a whole, as that appropriate to Mr. Eliot's scheme for a literary Review. But it is a good compromise.

Four other new journalistic ventures, launched with varying success since in 1922 may be mentioned, the first in chronological order was Wyndham Lewis's *Tyrol*, which was to herald the new Renaissance, and to provide a home for the "partly religious explosions of laughing Elementals." It contained critical work by Eliot and Read, one of John Adams' rare poems and pictures by the Vorticist group.

Mr. Middleton Murry's *Adelphi* struck a very different note when it appeared in 1923. It was to be a paper of Faith "an assertion of a faith . . . that life is important, and that more life should be man's endeavour." Mr. Murry attempted and seems to be continuing to attempt, a revival of interest in faith. *The New Coterie* is the scion of a literary

quarterly of the miscellany order, \*and preserves the same tendency toward the 'left' as the original *Côtier*, which has always done good work on behalf of the young writer and artist\*

*The Journal of Philosophical Studies* was first published in 1926. Conducted by some of the most eminent University philosophers, it presents, sedately and clearly, its matter in such a way that it may be understood of the (moderately intelligent) people. Embracing all aspects of the subject, it includes the discussion of art problems, and is likely to be of the greatest use to literary students who must now be realising that literature and philosophy are proceeding more closely together than formerly.

Some other critics deserve a fuller treatment than they are receiving here. Mr Orlo Williams, one of the keenest critics of criticism, who very pertinently questions the 'Eliot' attitude, and intelligently defends Mr Murry's, into which the emotional certainty of conviction more largely enters; Mr Muir, who watches the intellectualisation of literature closely enough to warn us that science is as yet only skin-deep; Mr Leonard Woolf, who has recently written regularly for

the Athenaeum; scholarly, vigilant, but necessarily too brief articles in a plain and vigorous style—often on subjects with which literature, as such, is not immediately concerned; Miss Sitwell, author of a Hogarth Essay on *Poetry and Criticism*, Mr H P Collins who, presumably on principle, has truncated the horizon of his *Modern Poetry*, and Mr Ivor Brown who is now imparting a much needed vigour to the *Saturday Review*. Sufficient ground at least has been covered to show something of the unrest and the earnest striving, for reluctant approach toward, or obstinate resistance to, more precise methods of criticism which will yield a greater 'dividend' of truth. From this distance it almost seems that the most intellectual of the schools is at present, and not wholly without protest from the next-door *stoa*, gaining in strength. This school, if its headmaster be Mr Richards, presents a materialistic front to Mr Murry and similar neo-romantics, while, for the more impressionable of the throng, *The Golden Bough*, and *The Interpretation of Dreams*, appear likely to prove efficient substitutes for the Bible. If one practised in the use of the burin could engrave a map

of the Critical Continent, a diversity of provinces would be indicated of Professors after their kind, two, or three, another with Gosse for its capital, city of (aesthetically) risqué entertainment, bordering on the domain of the personality-mongers Apollonian and Dionysian prefectures would be shown, with nucleus towns as antagonistic to one another as Manchester is (or was) to London. The *Mercury* terrain would be situated in a comfortable Western agricultural region, the *Criterion* district in a part in which tonic anticyclones, with a dominant East Wind, prevailed while Vorticism would be found in some mountainous industrial department. Communications and natural barriers would be clearly marked, as well as watersheds, theoretical and antitheoretical. The observer would be struck by its resemblance to the map of England.



### III. FICTION, AND THE UNREST OF THE AGE.

“Lo! Thy dread empire, Chaos! is restored”

The psychological current that was setting in at the time of Richardson and Laclos has flowed, until the present day, with increasing strength and with but few deviations from the straight course. Romantic tastes for pseudo-histories (Scott's, G P R James's,) and intricate plots (Dickens's, Wilkie Collins's,) caused unimportant deflexions, more recently G K Chesterton, after poking a little harmless fun at the analytic novel, attempted to revive the Collins tradition in his detective stories, but the current swept on with even greater impetus as though in reply to his little challenge. It seemed possible at one time that the notable performances of Mr Garnett might signalise the beginnings of a change, and now, supposing that a younger generation fell strongly under the influence of M Dekobra, a new direction might become apparent.

On closer inspection, the current is seen to be vexed with eddies and oblique motions, so that what seemed in the distance to be an orderly procession, has now become a chaos of differences, through which, nevertheless, the main direction is preserved. Mr Lawrence is interested in psychological aspects, so is Norman Douglas, and so is Sheila Kaye-Smith. But how great are the gulfs between! Mr De La Mare and Mr Firbank have both been called fantastic,—many times, no doubt; but it would be less inaccurate to group Lawrence and De La Mare together as novelists of flight from the reality of the present, than to speak of the fantasies of Firbank and De La Mare in the same breath. Or again to refer to Katherine Mansfield and Rebecca West as realists will be futile as an aid to the definition of the characteristics of their respective arts, but to call the former a quietist and the latter a methodist—a rude nomenclature—would at least suggest the contrast between the resignation to inward promptings, the mirrored quality, of *The Doves' Nest*, and the ranting manner of the later portions of *The Judge*.

The apparent confusion is increased by the large number of persons who are

producing fiction in every conceivable variety, and by the fact that much of this produce is not derivative could we but have had something like the Carracci or Caravaggio with their batches of imitators, it would be simple enough to compile a full and orderly chronicle. As it is, omissions must be made wholesale within the space available an attempt will be made to show such movements and cross-currents as seem to be the most significant, by selecting the works of the authors who are chiefly responsible for them. Michael Arlen, Mr Hutchinson, and Miss Dell will be among those excluded; from which it may be gathered that popular fiction is—unfairly perhaps,—to be ignored. It has a significance, it is true,—but for the alienist and the anthropologist rather than for the student of literature.

The dawn of the twentieth century found the didactic-romantic-realistic ideal coming even more into favour than in the youth of Wells and Bernard Shaw, and it was not long before the air was rent with the voices of preachers and prophets, deploring the moral and social condition of the age. Depressing novels by Mr. Galsworthy, dismal novels by Mr. Masfield, truculent novels



by Mr Belloc, helpful novels by Mr. Bennett, seemed to arrive most opportunely to promote the good resolutions made for the new century by a public that saw the folly of its fin-de-siècle wantonness. But the mood was of short duration, and the war merely hastened its inevitable eclipse. Before the catastrophe a relish for "steaming slices of life" without the sauce of a moral was no doubt increasing the sales of Compton Mackenzie's "lives" *Henry Brocken* and *The Return* had already introduced a new and very different note—the piping of beautiful ghosts; while Mr W W Jacobs never ceased to supply the sedative that the literature of "uplift" was so demanding.

Nor should it be forgotten that Mr D H Lawrence began his career as a novelist in 1911, and the great distance that he placed between himself and the "pulpit" school is measurable by anyone who has read *Fraternity*, *Men Like Gods*, and *Women In Love*. He may be a Romantic realist,—longing and dissatisfaction are romantic symptoms—but his problems, and his way of dealing with them, set him far apart from the pulpiteers.

Hitherto, it seems that the effect of these elder writers on fiction immediately before, during, and after the war, has been in the nature of a reaction, yet it would be incorrect to deny any continuity between the old and the new. Thomas Hardy's chronicling of the losing battles, noble or ignoble, between man and nature cannot have been entirely without effect, although Bergson and Butler have modified the view that "Crass Casualty obstructs the sun and rain"; there is an inevitability about some of Mr Walpole's episodes, a futility about Miss Macaulay's, a pitiful victimisation by fate of some of Sheila Kaye-Smith's characters (who, however, are not always without the consolations of religion), which may serve as a reminder of the gloom that Darwinism cast over a greater intelligence than Mr. Shaw's.

Joseph Conrad, with his deeper devotion to character, his rejection of ulterior sociological motives, his solemnly careful style, irritating, but less so than Wells' "getting there at all costs"\* or the *olla podrida* of slang and pomposity that one finds in *The White Monkey*, must be reckoned with, though there is no school of Conrad, and

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\* cf *Boon*

very few notable sea-stories have been lately written, besides Tennyson Jesse's *Tom Fool*† Conrad's style, whether regarded as a triumph or a magnificent failure, must certainly have heightened that interest in style which is practically universal among 'post-war' writers. Miss May Sinclair is more important as a psychological link; and Mr Mackenzie has had a large following among the biographical novelists.

On the whole then, pursuers of the Influence will be disappointed with the effect of the Edwardians on the Georgians and post-Georgians, but those whose pleasure is in defined and even opposing groups will, no doubt, have noticed that there is a something in the art of Douglas, Huxley, Firbank, Gerhardt, or Rose Macaulay, which is entirely missing in that of Mrs Woolf, D H Lawrence, Tennyson Jesse, Hugh Walpole, May Sinclair, Sheila Kaye-Smith, or Frank Swinnerton. Is it "tough-mindedness," in opposition to tender-mindedness? Is it the surface personality in predominance over the voice of the depths? Is it cynicism, wit, intellectual hardness, or what? If there is a single principle underlying all these and

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† Heinemann.

a greater self-consciousness, combined with a lesser measure of reverence, conscious or unconscious, for both Art and Life, the common quality might be said to be this. The general level of style is higher in the former group than in the latter, though the style of Mrs Woolf, a thing at present unique, is greatly admired by critics whose judgment is not to be ignored. But David Garnett, an unimpeachable stylist, falls neither into the "reverent" nor into the "irreverent" category, and Mr Mottram with 'points' about him analogous to some that are characteristic of both sides, will fit into neither.

Again, James Joyce, Dorothy Richardson, and Virginia Woolf give a surface effect of similarity because they do not handle their English in the generally accepted manner; but neither, for that matter, did Henry James, neither does Gertrude Stein. A more real link between them is the use of the semi-articulate soliloquy, or jottings of cerebral events to record the process of thought. Mr Murry has also experimented in this new form in his *The Voyage*.

Regarded from the point of view of "seeing life steadily and seeing it whole,"

current fiction appears at the first glance to have lost the longer and larger views of the Victorians, but this phenomenon may, after all, bear some relation to the fallacy so often expressed in the phrase, "there were giants in those days"

### *A Nearer View*

#### I

A period like the present, in which art is seeking to justify itself by proving a psychological ancestry, is a fortunate one for Miss Sinclair, who was studying philosophy in the 'Nineties, and whose distinctly perky *Defence of Idealism* appeared in 1917. It might be expected, though it does not necessarily follow, that the philosophical observer of humanity would preserve a certain detachment from the matter of the research. Miss Sinclair does not, there is a personal anxiety for the fate of her characters that throws her into contrast with Hardy, and a feverish restlessness that brings her books nearer to conditions of dreams than to "steaming slices of life," and that recalls the words used by Davenant when finding fault with Spenser for certain fantasies "resembling a continu-

All the circumstances of the three-dimensional love-affair are reproduced in the phantom world, a fact which is most convenient for the present purpose, since, not only does Miss Sinclair appear obviously more at home on the yonder than on the hither side of the tomb,) but the hotel room where the liaison was conducted in "reality" is rather less convincing than its umbra beyond the veil

One feels (it is merely a matter of feeling) that her metaphysical and psychological speculations are for her the great reality, far more concrete than the human beings and civilisation through which they are manifested, and infinitely more so than negligible details like the kind of football played at league matches, or the kind of engine defect that will sink a ship

The comparative unreality of her "life" may be due to the fact that it is compounded of various theories, and synthetic, like the whisky whose secret is only known to the alchemists of Osaka, it seems convincing enough to such as do not know or cannot distinguish the genuine products Before Mrs Bloom the most wicked female creation, with 'lascivious mouth,' of Miss Sinclair's

genius, squeaks, gibbers, and flies,—“l’image d’un autre univers”

Life may be philosophy to Miss Sinclair, with the absolute as a goal, to Sheila Kaye-Smith the Anglo-Catholic faith is the corresponding reality, but it does not deprive her visible world of the substance to which it has a right. Both are novelists and both are religious in their way, but there is more of the perfervid atmosphere that the “lady religious novelist” might be expected to disseminate about Miss Sinclair than about Sheila Kaye-Smith, who is unusually cool and self-collected on so exciting a subject as Belief. Her *Anglo-Catholicism* (1926) is anything but perky, and reflects a mood of tranquil conviction that prepossesses one considerably in her favour, she makes the very best of this alternative to modernism (which in its widest sense embraces creeds as far apart as that of the thought-built after-life, of Miss Sinclair, which is Oriental in conception, and the Mortalism\* perceptible in Read’s *Phoenix* collection) and draws up a very attractive case for the devotional life, in *The End of The House of Alard*. Her modern young man is no less at home in

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\* cf Saurat’s *Milton*.

the petroleous atmosphere of the garage, inspecting the mechanism of Ford cars, than he is when following the intricacies of the Anglo-Catholic liturgy through the smoke-barrage of thuribles. Furthermore the same young man prefers the cloister to his right to succeed to one of those squiredoms which post-war taxation has rendered practically untenable. The age of land-owning by feudal families has passed, and any attempt to continue it is sheer idolatry to "a wicked old dying god, that can only be kept alive by human sacrifices." Sir Gervase Alard accordingly prefers to remain brother Joseph. The romantic view that Religion is an adventure is developed more successfully in this novel than in the 'saintly-picaresque' *Tramping Methodist*, where the external adventure is emphasised at the expense of the inward Odyssey of the soul, and the orthodox ending of matrimony, instead of monastic vows, looks like a concession to the groundlings. But Methodism, the early form of which was, of course much nearer to the Anglo-Catholic ideal\* than the camp-meeting type of the Southern States, sustains the hero, a veritable

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\* *Anglo Catholicism*, §3



knockabout tragedian, through incredibly severe trials, landing him safely with the lady of his choice at the Kentish marches

So far Miss Sinclair and Sheila Kaye-Smith are shown to be related, loosely but definitely, as spiritual romanticists; but there is this great difference between them, viz, that whereas the former is not of this world, the latter is very much of it. She is preoccupied as much with the beauty of the land as with that of religion, and if the *Tramping Methodist* is primarily a religious novel, *Sussex Gorse* is primarily a novel of the earth. We left the hero of *The Tramping Methodist* about to enter the county of Sussex, which the authoress, despite the intrusions of Belloc and Rudyard Kipling, has made her own. As a territorial novelist she becomes a link with the past, in which, besides Hardy's Wessex, we had the Dartmoor of Phillpotts and "John Trevena," the Delectable Duchy of Professor Quiller-Couch and Miss Jesse, or Bennett's Five Towns. Territorialism appears just at present to be a depreciating asset, though the Wales of Caradoc Evans\* and the

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\* Cf *My People* (1915), *Capel Sion* (1916), *My Neighbours*, (1918) (Melrose)

Scarborough of Osbert Sitwell\* must not be forgotten. We have noticed that the English countryside was quite the fashion among the early Georgian poets, and it is not surprising to find landscape settings repeated to the limit of endurance by novelists of approximately the same age, ranging from Lawrence to E M Delafield, they offer us a quite extensive topography of the duller parts of great Britain.

Her interest in sex psychology is purely subordinate, whereas in Miss Sinclair's it holds a prominent place. Personages like Lena Wrace who, Miss Sinclair informs us, could at the age of forty-seven "still give that effect of triumph and excess, of something rich and ruinous and beautiful," would scarcely feel at ease in Anglo-Catholicised Sussex, if it were more than a few miles from Brighton. It is true that affairs of sex are dispersed through her novels, (cf, *The George and the Crown*), but they are incidental to some more comprehensive struggle with circumstance. In *The George and the Crown* the two inns are almost more important than the human characters, as fate

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\* Cf. *Triple Fugue*

seems to have "put up" for a time at both In *Sussex Gorse* Boarzell Moor is certainly the most living thing in the book Miss Sinclair's "ride-for-a-fall" style lures one on with the promise, fulfilled at intervals, of a catastrophe, and Sheila Kaye-Smith captivates with a demure limpidity which even the Rother and the Arun could not rival, but a short acquaintance with Mr Walpole's work may convince one that there will be neither catastrophe nor clarity. If we take his English as typical of the modern 'centre,' we may conclude that the norm is "opaqueness and safety first"

"She had never had a day's illness in her life. When she had borne her son, Brand, she had been up and about within a week of his birth. And yet she had none of that aggressive good health that is so customary with physically triumphant people."

Safety once established, there may be diffident raids into 'rugged' territory. "With all his money he did not know what comfort was, nor colour, nor gentleness, or the laughter of friends." "His own gaunt body with its high cold forehead, its bald and bony cranium, its naked eyes and projecting teeth, its long legs and iron-

grey hands, held no comfort for any human soul. Even his dog did not care for him."\* And even then the ruggedness is well worn down, bevelled at the edges, rounded like a hospital ward, it is ruggedness adapted for use in an English Cathedral town, steeped in comfort and tradition.

One is ready to concede that, when he left his particular sphere of homeliness for Russia in war-time (*The Dark Forest*), he seemed to rise above himself, and certainly above the level of his domestic fiction,—which lies well below that of Trollope, but who is there who would not prefer Barchester to Polchester? *The Cathedral* is prefaced by a few bars from Debussy's *Cathédrale Engloutie*, but something by Hollins or Wolstenholme would have furnished a more appropriate opening voluntary, since the air to be breathed is so essentially Anglo-Saxon. The motif of a hopeless struggle against fate is, as we have seen, no new thing in English fiction, but Mr Walpole gives his own reading of the inexorable (see also *The Prelude to Adventure* and *The Wooden Horse*). The same might be said of the theme of

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\* Both excerpts are from *The Old Ladies*

cruelty to children, which Mr Dennis has handled more skilfully in *Mary Lee*, both being indebted to Dickens

Aspiring to be a "strong" novelist, and painting in his shadows imposingly dark, he succeeds in turning out good solid articles of British manufacture, which makes it all the more remarkable that at least two critics have compared him to the Russians. He is entirely devoid of that nervous activity which is peculiar to the horror-mongering type of Russian writer (not of course a Poushkin or a Gogol). The critics in question should re-read *Seven who were Hanged*. Mr Geoffrey Dennis is a good deal nearer the mark.

The ruggedness of Mr Cannan, *horrendum, informe*, etc, makes his novels as unreadable, perhaps, as anything in the language. His saga of the Lawries (*Little Brother, Annette and Bennett*), seems like a study in ugliness and disorder for their own sakes, nothing of real value has been contributed to letters, and there is nothing distinguished in the manner of its presentation, which belongs, if anywhere, to the fairly recent stratum of dreariness which was answerable for repertory plays like *Chains* and the heavier novels of Arnold Bennett,—

though Mr Bennett, even at his most solemn moments, positively glitters before this fuliginous dulness

While Mr Walpole's English is a fair example of the orthodox modern, Mr Cannan experiments from time to time in rambling sentences, lightly sprinkled with commas like clumsy imitations of Henry James This is specially noticeable when a subjective view is presented.

"Stations were important Almost more than anything else they chimed with the music of Jamie's voice and they were full of noise and steam and the beat of steel on steel—"clag, clog, dog, dig, dag, dog"—that was what the train wheels said to the rails and the watchful eagerness in himself catching at any power that would seize him and swing him away from the heavy, heavy quietness in which people slumbered, breaking it only with peevish voices and the munching of their months as they ate "J'aime, tu aimes, il aime," that was Aunt Phoebe's voice, but much, much more interesting was the "glug, glug, glug," that came from her stomach""\*

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\* *Annetie and Bennett*

The telegraphic idiom of Miss Richardson is not an entirely satisfactory solution of the problem of rendering the flow of idle thought, but it is less exasperating than this

The reader who finds his chief sustenance in poetry, or the critical essay, or both, is less likely to be satisfied with the "ordinary good novel" (e g , a book by Mr. Walpole, Mr Swinnerton, or Mr Brett Young) than the subscriber to a circulating library who regards contemporary fiction as a pleasant drug for consumption during leisure hours. It is probable, indeed, that the "ordinary good novel" will not exist for him, if one may take it that this kind is the one that, soothing, and not stimulating, lulls the intellect asleep and substitutes its own 'grip' for conscious mental control, after the manner of moving pictures. A ridiculously bad or arrestingly good novel would not do this. So the average hypnotic novel would be unlikely to appeal to one accustomed to the intellectual effort which the study of poetry and criticism demands. Didactic novelists like Wells and Galsworthy, who may be read without any such effort, belong to the sedative class; so do writers like Geoffrey Moss or Mr Swinnerton, who

provide enthralling and even sensational tales of the relations of men and women Mr Moss's *Sweet Pepper*, contains all the ingredients of an arm-chair thrill, a 'luxury' continental setting, the study of an English girl who earns her living as a professional mistress to wealthy foreigners. It is efficient; one feels convinced that Mr Moss would have graduated honourably at a correspondence college for authors,—and the same may be said of Mr Swinnerton. The "old man" in his *The Chaste Wife* is a perfect villain of fiction, a cadging, malevolent type who blackmails his own son, to whom he addresses, with almost his dying breath, the word "cuckold!"—but after all he is not much more than a diabolical and grotesque edition of Dr Firmin, Dr Firmin, one might say with a dash of Uncle Silas. A little culture, some mention of Leigh Hunt or Flaxman, or Dekker, imparts tactfully a subdued highbrow tint to the homespun fabric. There is practically nothing of an irritant nature in these composition; but the insidious sentimentality of Stephen Mackenna, which is not the honest and more palatable sort that has endeared Sir James Barrie to his ten thousands, is likely to annoy those



whom it does not amuse. The characters in *Sonia* and *Sonia Married* are all tiresome for this reason,—and the hero and heroine particularly. These novels seem to lie between the “devil” of Mr Mackenzie’s atmosphere of “seeing real life” and the deep sea of Mr Hutchinson’s mawkishness; the style is very tolerable and the psychology of the type that should appeal to adolescents.

## II

It would appear that, in order to arrive at the stage of average fiction of the type that will secure half a column of staid approval in the *Times Literary Supplement* and elicit phrases like “thoughtful and arresting” or “brilliant psychology” from the provincial press, it has been requisite to descend gradually from the high or relatively high value-standard set by May Sinclair and Sheila Kaye-Smith. The examination of yet another aspect of the novel and of the genius of James Joyce, will necessitate a re-ascent of the scale. Miss Sinclair and Mr Joyce—a strange combination,—seek by philosophical methods, more or less thinly disguised, to explain the enigma of humanity; but where-as it seems as though Miss Sinclair, starting

at the (1) abstract (2) universal (3) spiritual end, works downwards, Mr Joyce, commencing with the (1) concrete (2) particular (3) material end, works upward, another alluring system for division immediately suggests itself—the Platonic-Realist, and the Aristotelian-Nominalist. There is something at least as radically opposed in the attitudes of these two essentially psychological investigators.

But Mr Joyce is vastly more informative on the subject of man than Miss Sinclair for several reasons, one is that he has destroyed most of the customary machinery of the novelist; plot, situation, time-sequence and such components of the recognised novel-form do not hamper him in *Ulysses*, and even in the more conventional *Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man*, noticeable liberties are taken with the formula of the accepted "biography" type that will have prepared us for the complete break with tradition we shall encounter in *Ulysses*. The form and construction of *Ulysses* has been discussed several times; a *locus classicus* is Mr Valérie Larbaud's article\* in which he demonstrates that it is modelled closely on that of the

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\* *The Criterion* Oct. 1922

Odyssey of Homer This does not seem, however, to be so important as the clue that in *Ulysses* psychic or mental time predominates over mathematical time,—a fact which will go far towards restoring order to an apparent chaos.

Another reason is his undoubtedly wider experience of books and life, a third, that he began writing fiction\* as a highly efficient descriptive realist, with well-developed powers of observation and communication,—an advantageous starting-point for the conceptual goal of *Ulysses*, realism supplies the material from which the concept grows.

*Ulysses*, inasmuch as it is a narrative of imaginary human characters, is a novel, and judged from this standpoint, a most unsatisfactory one. But it is much more besides; one might call it with greater accuracy a satirical epic of modern primitive man. Herein lies a resemblance to the Odyssey, which is also an epic of the primitive man of the time, and is, like *Ulysses*, heavily charged with folk-history and mythology, rite and magic, though in the latter book

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\* Cf *Dubliners* (Grant Richards 1914, and Huebsch 1916, 1917. Also Jonathan Cape, 1926)

these things are introduced consciously to show, (for this was surely one of the author's intentions) how enormously primitive man remains amidst his mechanical civilisation . Stephen Dedalus the "bard" and aesthete, may regard himself as the over-man who has passed through disillusion beyond faith towards reason, but he is as primitive as the Cro-Magnon artist,—who probably thought very much the same thing, he is a savage type, arrogant, self-centred, and nasty in his habits—the nose-picking, brothel-haunting type of artist\* who is ever with us But if the character of Dedalus is a general judgment upon the artistic type, it scarcely . holds; it is probable that a Dedalus will be found more frequently among persons of the "artist-manqué" description than among true artists; it is a clearly infantile stage

Mr Bloom, the 'Ulysses' of the book, has adapted himself more cunningly to material reality,—is more worldly-wise, in short But he is a Jew, in whom this adaptability is instinctive; as such he is unconsciously more civilised than the Celt But unconscious civilisation does not take

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\* *Vide* remarks on the *Blast* manifesto, *supra*.

him very far, after all Pornology ~~and~~ and superstition haunt him, together with other spectres from the primal mud. He is, like the other leading characters, an allegorisation of in a certain aspect—opposed to Dedalus's—, of human nature Mrs Bloom is femininity reduced to its lowest common measure—a full measure of grossness and fertility; she is part of the primal mud itself, scarcely modified. If man has made but little headway against barbarism, woman (to judge from the final soliloquy in the book) has made none whatever.

It would be too paradoxical to acquit Mr. Joyce of obscenity, as much as it would be acquit mythology of the same charge; but it is quite a tenable view to hold that this is introduced in a proportion scarcely exceeding that in which it colours or forms the subject of the dreams, waking or sleeping, and the rites and customs, of the mass of humanity, Nineteenth century convention in Europe caused it to become, for the time at least, less apparent, and there are, and perhaps always have been, certain types of mind in which it is so modified as to be unidentifiable to the ordinary observer—but with these Mr Joyce is not concerned

They are not of the Folk.

If the recent movement in England in the direction of folk-lore study, morris-dancing for deans and dowagers, revival of peasant industries and fairy legends, anthropology, and so forth, could be represented graphically, *The Golden Bough* and *Ulysses* would appear as two very salient apices (the former the most so) upon the chart, while the furthest point reached in the study of psychoanalysis would provide a third. The popular mind, prompted by cheap fiction, the cinema and the music-hall, is always creating a pantheon as definite as that of India. Mr Joyce includes a vast number of these fancies, some incarnate, some partly "materialised" notions. As, for example, "the 'vamp,' Mrs Miriam Dandrade, the luscious barmaid, the Misses Douce and Kennedy, "brutal and licentious soldiery," Privates Carr and Compton, religious idiom of the People, Elijah

The style of *Ulysses* bears on the problem of presenting "the spirit of man." At first sight it appears to be no style, on further examination it will be seen that there are different styles for different parts of the book, each performing a separate function. Thus,

the saloon-bar episode (Miss Douce and Miss Kennedy) has a kind of fugal arrangement, the subject of the fugue being incomprehensible until it has been developed. The last chapter depends on an almost complete absence of punctuation for its realistic effect, which is that of a verbatim description of a reverie (Mrs Bloom's). The brothel-scene, which is the climax of the book, consists of dialogue in dramatic form, with stage directions. The section following contains in certain descriptive passages most of the clichés that any provincial journalist has ever used, in these may be seen instances of the popular idea of fine writing, with plenty of expressions like "the recent visitation of Jupiter Pluvius," "trusty henchman," "ornament of the legal profession," etc, while an earlier section includes a large number of "captions" in the most faultless journalese tradition. The Maternity Hospital episode is written in a chain of styles found successively in English literature, and ranging from the Old English alliterative ("before born babe bliss had Within womb won he worship") to a telegraphic 'futurist' prose of this kind, "'Tis sure What say? In the speakeasy

Tight I shee you, shir Bantam, two days ' teetee Bowsing nowt but claret wine Garn! Have a glint, do " Some of these styles, e g, the modern 'folk' English, the tags from newspapers and popular or inferior fiction supply, definitely, colouring and substance, others seem to be exhibitions of virtuosity, and others again (such as the last chapter or the uncompleted sentences conveying the wandering thoughts of Bloom in part II) devices for a convincing representation of unuttered musings. The result is not harmonious, but the attempt is ambitious, and though others may find in *Ulysses* as a whole the unity and equilibrium which one would presumably demand in a great work of art, the present writer must confess his failure to do so. In the matter chosen for proof and illustration, there is even more disorder. Apart from the allusions to local affairs and persons which are only of importance to inhabitants of Dublin, there is much that an author with a keener sense of what is and is not necessary and relevant, would have omitted, and for this reason *Ulysses* is quite needlessly long. The case for and against humanity could have been summed up as vividly and effectively—more,



so, indeed, in half the space. The *Golden Bough*, from its very nature, can stand the enormous weight of evidence that it bears it is both the museum and the professor's explanation of the specimens. But the satiric-epic does not require, nor as an intended work of art of this kind should it include, such a mass of particulars.

The break-up of "traditional" English, coincident with the search for a medium that will convey satisfactorily the meanderings of the brain, may seem to mark the beginning of a new style and method of intensive analysis; if so the revolutionary process is remarkably gradual. A Joyce school has yet to come into being, though four years have passed since the publication of *Ulysses*, and eight since the first edition of "A Portrait of the Artist" was produced by Huebsch. There are, nevertheless, a few writers who have made interesting experiments in technique, Wyndham Lewis's *Tarr* (1917, The Egoist Press), and his *Cantelman's Spring Mate* (1918)\* even more so, are written, like all his prose, in a

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\* I am uncertain about this date, and have no means of verification,—not possessing a copy of the book (which I borrowed some years ago)

strongly characteristic and untraditional style Mr Lewis is both a psychological (or analytic) and metaphysical novelist, and so, *Tarr* illustrates the laws that control nature and society, in so far as they apply to the particular case of the artist, or "artistic temperament" (partially developed artist not unsuggestive of Stephen Dedalus) in his relation to society, and embraces a very clear analysis of this temperament, embodied in the German who is the "villain-hero" of the story. For it is very plainly a story in the accepted sense, three-dimensional and in logical sequence.

The prose of Miss Dorothy Richardson moves further away from 'the rounded period' in the direction of verbal pointillisme and staccato effects. Henry James raised to perfection the long and highly ramified sentence, and the use of the comma. Miss Richardson explores in the opposite direction but has not yet mastered the placing of the full stop. So far she has failed to create, to make a really distinguished and significant form or style of her odd-length sentences and jolting punctuation which, however laudable it may be as an experiment, conveys the rather distressing impression of an

attempt to be "clever"

"Yet the free-lovers dancing there seemed both sadness and mockery Dancing is shimmer Satin and silk and white slippers Rooms white and gold Massed flowers Rapt faces to whom problems and socialism are unknown" This is quite typical; and it is a good deal further from distintegration of the familiar idiom than Joyce's "tailing-off" sentences She commits herself less audaciously than Joyce to the deeps of experiment

While she wisely refrains from attempting an encyclopedic treatise on humanity, her determination, the reverse of Joyce's, to see life steadily rather than whole, may betray her into undue emphasis of experiences that are of no great worth *The Trap*, for example, is an ingenious recital of the unimportant relations between two unimportant types of women. It is exasperating to see talent wasted on attempting to knock such material into artistic shape when an abundance of finer stuff is left unexploited But it is perhaps inevitable; the peculiar talent (arbitrarily distinguished from genius) requires its peculiar expression, both being involved in a

certain measure of insignificance. Thus, both she and Mr Joyce, starting from distant bases, encroach on a common ground of error.

One might hesitate to insist that the test of greatness is the power of creating myth, —in drama and fiction at least, but this power certainly contributes to greatness when accompanied by certain other qualities; but it can exist apart from them, and creations by inferior authors (Mark Sabre, The Sheik, Sexton Blake), may occupy niches in the popular pantheon. It seems to be due to a kind of intensely vital emotional fertility which few modern authors possess Mr Joyce has it the notoriety of Mr Bloom, the Anti-Pickwick (as one might say "Anti-Christ") of the intelligentsia, has made him immortal for an increasing multitude. Mr. Galsworthy has perhaps succeeded with his Forsytes, but who troubles about the characters of Miss Richardson, Mrs Woolf, Mr Swinnerton, or Mr. Huxley? It is possible that if some of these writers were gifted with this power in addition to their high intellectual qualities they might achieve the greatness that they just miss. Miss Richardson has the intellectual equipment,

but is deficient in the life-giving faculty, and in the *flair* for the valuable Madame Bovary (in France at least) has won proverbial fame as much as Hamlet in this country, and her character possesses the importance of universality. Miss Holland has too local an habitation and name to survive.

A more moderate devotee of the full stop may be observed in Virginia Woolf; and a third seeker after a medium suitable for the reproduction on paper of thought-processes. The grimness of Mr. Joyce is fitly expressed in the aggregate of his styles, and at his harshest he breaks down the familiar images of prose with a kind of ironical fury. But neither grimness, harshness, nor fury require frantic expression in Mrs. Woolf's prose works, whether it be an acute emotional crisis, or the interior of a florist's shop that requires description, her style maintains uniformly its grace, its dramatic incisiveness linked with suavity. Horror and disaster are dealt with in no personal, exclamatory fashion, but objectively, with the same classic calm with which she might discuss George Eliot (supposing,—

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\* (Duckworth, 1925)

and it might be expected — that she were treated objectively) The maniac, Septimus, (in *Mrs Dalloway*)\* contemplates death, the words of the soliloquy, though emphasised by ‘massed’ punctuation, preserve something of smoothness and much of dignity

“The whole world was clamouring  
kill yourself, for our sakes But why  
should he kill himself for their sakes?  
Food was pleasant; the sun hot, and  
this killing oneself, how does one set  
about it, with a table knife, uglily, with  
floods,—by sucking a gaspipe? He was too  
weak, he could scarcely raise his hand”  
Comparison with the sample of Miss  
Richardson above may lead one to suspect  
that *epitikeia*, a classical virtue, is less hers  
than Mrs. Woolf’s, comparison with Mr.  
Joyce leads to a similar conclusion For a  
‘progressive,’ then, she is a smooth and  
polished writer; her idiom has something in  
common with those of innovators like Miss  
Richardson, and Joyce at moments, but it  
has even more wherein it differs; in its  
appearance, for example, of growth out of  
the past Without being in any way a

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\* The Hogarth Press 1925.

pastich, the style has an Augustan ring; we are reminded of Defoe. But if the style recalls tradition, so does the subject-treatment; carrying out her own precept,\* she eschews the Georgian-Edwardian methods of characterisation by externals (houses, diseases, Poor-Laws, etc) and seeks conscientiously for the true essentials of personality. Another link is thus, surely, established; this time with the *Caractères*, with La Bruyère, Addison, Ben Jonson, and Theophrastus. Jonson, whose "Humours" are the independent creation of a man who, nevertheless, knew his Theophrastus, does not describe Amorphus in terms of furniture, rates, and taxes, but

"He speakes all creame, skimd, and more affected then a dozen of waiting women"

What then, of the rich and variegated externals amid which Clarissa Dalloway, for instance, is seen to move? It is clear enough, I think, that it is not they that express and interpret the character, but the character that interprets, and expresses

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\* Cf *Character in Fiction* (*The Criterion*, July 1921), *Modern Fiction* (*The Common Reader*)

herself through, them. To take one more extract at random "So the room was an attic; the bed narrow, and lying there reading, for she slept badly, she could not dispel a virginity preserved through childbirth which clung to her like a sheet. Lovely in girlhood, suddenly there came a moment—for example on the river beneath the woods at Clevedon—when, through some contraction of this cold spirit, she had failed him."

The prose of Ronald Firbank advances in a different direction, and from a different base; he issues from and at the same time repudiates the 'Nineties' as post-impressionism does impressionism; and his relation to the outlook of the earlier period may be gauged by a study of his *Princess Zoubaroff* together with *The Importance of being Ernest*. The fact that he can say elegantly what Wilde would no doubt have rendered coarsely is but a single clue out of many. One might fancy the detachment with which he scrutinises the world to be that of a capricious but not illogical spirit, a sort of worldly Ariel, whom the vagaries of mankind entertain as much as they trouble Mr Joyce. All of his novels are lyrical, "songs of Apollo," the music



of which intensifies the dry, empty brilliance of Miss Richardson, the beautiful solidity Mrs Woolf. The sensuousness of his style, now drooping, now pirouetting, always with the grace of some hermaphroditic dancer or *pantomimus*, is easy to distinguish, for it has no parallel in our literature.

"the lament of the peacocks announced a return of the storm. Since mid-day their plangent, disquieting cries had foretold its approach. Moving rapidly to and fro in their agitation, their flowing fans sweeping rhythmically the ground, they traced fevered curves beneath the overarching trees, orchestrating, with barbarity, as they did so, their strident screech with the clangour of the chapel bell that seemed, as it rang, to attract towards it, a bank of tawny gold, cognac-coloured cloud, ominously fusing to sable" (*Valmouth*, Grant Richards, 1919),

Just as the popular verdict on Joyce was "obscure, obscene," so would it be commonly said of Firbank (were he widely read) that he was bizarre, perverse, and decadent \*

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\* "This is the real decadence" *Land and Water*

"All the characters are bizarre—as bizarre as the style." *The Times*.

"A weird medley of Bearsdleyesque chatter" *Irish Life*

Most of these adjectives have relative values or emotional or vague meanings and are unhelpful; but they may suggest (unintentionally) that while Mr Joyce mingles philosophy with leg-pulling and sees much in every-day life that is not meant to be seen though it is there, Mr Firbank has nothing to say of or to everyday life but creates an ornate and opulent yet delimited life, as the sixteenth century fashioned rich conceits, to convey a rare experience. He conveys it through the medium of the hysteria of female saints, the erotic perversities of the elegant, the massing of tropical flowers and persons, the baptism of dogs in Spanish cathedrals, negro masseuses, pert choristers, and vulgar English servants; and what he conveys is an experience, not of fantasy, but of life. His work stands as a protest against the realist heresy that "life" means drunken persons in a garret by Zola or Wessex yokels by Hardy. More symbolically, it may also mean the Countess of Constantine "who had coined that felicitous phrase *some men's eyes are sweet to rest in*. Limping a little, she had strained her foot, alas, while turning backward somersaults to a Negro band in the Black Ball-room of the Infanta Eulalia-

Irene .. ”

There is no reason why those who would not exclaim at the strange beauties of the Niellist schools, of Longhi, or of Goya, should be so perturbed over Mr Firbank; one critic, indeed, goes so far as to call him a Futurist (the Glasgow Herald) Were it not for the myopia induced by realistic naturalism, it would be the books about Mr Lawrie or Mr Forsyte that they would find so alarming His premature death practically at the moment when he had brought his technique to perfection (*The Eccentricities of Cardinal Perelli*, 1926)\* was a double calamity There had been a steady advance from the rather too aerial brilliance of *Caprice*, through *Valmouth* and *The Flower beneath the Foot*, to this peak of excellence,—though indeed, the *Flower beneath the Foot* is all but on the same level

### III

Wit, mainly epigrammatic, is the life and soul of Mr. Firbank's work, whether narrative

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\* This novel was reviewed in the *Times Literary Supplement*, August 19, 1926, being dismissed with a few inches of timidity, while it took a whole column in the same number to discuss a “best seller” by Ian Hay!

or dramatic,—wit, too of a kind that makes Mr Bernard Shaw look like a clumsy buffoon at a village fair. But this is an insufficient pretext for grouping Mr Firbank with Mr Norman Douglas. If Mr Firbank could be compared with anyone, it might be Louis Aragon, but he has no connexion as Mr Douglas has, with Anatole France, Thomas Love Peacock, and Aristophanes. A good deal of the uproarious fun in *South Wind*\* and at least one joke in *They Went* (the episode of the dwarfs sitting down on a nearly red-hot stone) is patently Aristophanic, but there is nothing of the sort in Mr Firbank's books.

Again both Mr Douglas and Mr Firbank have 'cosmopolitan' interests, and are attracted by the Mediterranean coast; but this resemblance is purely artificial. Mr Douglas is the "de-insularised" Englishman, but Mr Firbank is of no nation, and he is but lightly bound by place and time.

*South Wind* is not so much a plot-novel as one illustrative of a general judgment;

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\* Martin Secker (1917 and 3 later editions)  
*They Went* (Chapman and Hall 1920)

which might be summed up as follows, "Climate alters moral values." Under the influence of the Mediterranean sirocco, an Anglican Bishop learns to sympathise with such human weaknesses as dipsomania and even murder, and mingles quite unrestrainedly with the cosmopolitan oddities who have found an asylum on an Italian Island. At a final symposium his new sense of proportion is confirmed, as he watches, after a liberal allowance of wine, the moon engaged in strange antics.

"The Bishop was filled with a sense of the screamingly funny insignificance of everything. Then he noticed the moon it soon took to behaving in the most extraordinary fashion. Sometimes there were two moons, and sometimes one. They seemed to merge together—to glide into each other, and then to separate again. He said; "I've seen many funny things here, Denis. But this is the funniest of all."

The exercise of ironic sympathy with foibles and "humours" has been raised to the status of a fine art by Mr Douglas; not only can he bring to life the innocuous Waterton, but he can very nearly (he would

quite, were the novel *They Went* as much of a work of genius as *South Wind*) make us appreciate the point of view of the Princess who drops her lovers, one by one, down the drain. But *They Went* is tainted with mannerism, a sign, I would venture to suggest, of nervous fatigue. Without a jewel to bite on, the machine that cuts lapidary wit grinds the empty air; and this is liable to occur at intervals in any of his writings. What one might name the 'corollary' style is a fair example of these intermittently recurrent affectations. Thus;

"What a charming dreamer!" he thought.  
It was rather convenient for the Count to be  
able to pass, just then, for a dreamer  
As a matter of fact, he was an extremely  
practical old gentleman'

(*South Wind*)

And thus

"The Arab boy, they will tell you, is full of  
guile, and must be repressed

Granted, but—

A Colony, furthermore, is not an orchid

Granted

QED" (*Fountains in the Sand*)

Fortunately, these laboured witticisms are safely outnumbered by those of easier birth;

the biography of the leader of the Little White Cows, and much of the Peacockian dialogue in *South Wind* is as nearly perfect as such things could be

Mr Douglas is not one of the younger generation, but his work, conceived with strong, hard outlines and bright colour, and savouring adequately of Mediterranean un-sentimentality, is likely to prove congenial to the type of reader who has a taste for the three Sitwells. Further, he is the "prolegomenon" to Aldous Huxley. But little sympathy for human follies and weaknesses will be found so far, in Mr Huxley's novels and short stories. *Uncle Spenser* (in *Little Mexican*) is an exception, but he is too likeable an old gentleman to provoke chastisement. Mr Huxley's reputation is built on his satirical prowess, but while most of his characters are thinly disguised anthropoid apes, he endows a few with something of that nobility which, we flatter ourselves into claiming, is the proprium of man. Most of the persons in *Chrome Yellow* and *Antic Hay* belong to the former category. The formula for *Chrome Yellow* has come to be regarded as typical for the Huxley novel: a country house populated largely

with "moderns" of high-brow pretensions and animal tendencies; plenty of brilliant dialogue in a manner reminiscent of Peacock and Douglas, a dash of promiscuity, and a good deal of disgust. The disgust is increased in *Antic Hay*, an exposure of the aimless wanderings of a twentieth century 'ship of fools' "Corporall Voluptuosyte, unprofytable stody, unkyndnes, lepynges and dauncis," and others of Barclay's collection, are here represented, as a crowd of 'bohemians' whose existence does not seem to be justified. The attitude is not so much the ironic despair of the young man in his first contact with reality, as a recognition of the turpitude of certain realities. The compromise of sympathy shown by Douglas (Miss Wilberforce the dipsomaniac) or Anatole France (Jerome Coignard) is not permitted by Mr Huxley's conscientious earnestness. All these characters are irredeemably vile because they are parasitic, and parasitic because they have not attempted to solve the problem of the use of life and Mr Huxley himself, at this stage, seems to be doubtful about its solution. In *Those Barren Leaves*, he strives to discover an answer. Life can no longer be lived by the



'average thinking person' with a view to rewards in a non-existent Heaven. "As the flesh sickens the spirit sickens . Finally the flesh dies and putrefies , and the spirit presumably putrefies too " \* " Salvation's not not in the next world ; it's in this." The task of man is to find a more important reality " Perhaps if you spend long enough and your mind is the right sort, of mind, perhaps you really do get beyond the limitations of ordinary existence " Mr. Calamy has determined to seek the 'real' reality by becoming a kind of Zen anchorite and practising meditation, to which the ennui of house party atmospheres and love-adventures has driven him But after bidding farewell to his friends he is filled with doubt and depression, and is only reassured by the sight of a mountain—of physical nature, in short This is significant, as it suggests both that the hermit may choose the country for other reasons than solitude, and that Mr Huxley is committing himself to the view that mountains are good for the human soul, which in him, at least, is unexpected.

As a stylist Mr Huxley is normal and

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\* See note on Milton's belief, *supra*.

restrained, occupying very efficiently a place in the left centre; he cultivates with success a Latin clarity, coolness, and graceful theme-development which removes him to a great distance from James Joyce. His sense of form, as it is called, is of the very kind that is favourable to short story writing, and in this department he shares the honours with Katherine Mansfield. Whether he uses the plot form (*The Joconda Smile*) or the study form (*Uncle Spenser*, or *Two or Three Graces*), he acquits himself, save for an occasional lapse like *The Monocle*, which reeks of "potboiling," equally well. *Two or Three Graces*\* is a tragedy of serious pose, or of what Shaw called "idealism." The two principal characters are romantic self-hypnotists, Kingham, having been persuaded that all the world has to offer is pain and evil, conscientiously tortures himself, "and love must be, if experienced, explained away as depravity." "What a thing it is to have a vice!" he began, ". . . A vice, a vice." He was enchanted by the word, it became, for the moment, the core of his universe. Grace hypnotises herself, but also surrenders

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\* This and all Mr Huxley's work is published by Chatto and Windus

combined ; a ship's surgeon and a stewardess flirt together at the bedside of a dying child. Once more we are reminded of an irresponsible simian community, but this time it is too absurd to be disgusting.

Mr Gerhardt's novels have been impeached on the ground that they are notebooks or series of jottings, but one might put it better by calling them series of dissolving views. Yet after all, the life they describe is little more than this, so that there is a certain appropriateness in the slightly dislocated style. Mr Goldring treats the "sparkling throng" somewhat less jerkily, though the social stratum and phase that he deals with is as nomadic, unrestful, and promiscuous as Mr Gerhardt's Migratory swarms and permanent fugitives from Britain in Italy, night-clubs and the sexual wavering that has become more noticed if not more noticeable since the war, provide a very fair substitute for Mr Gerhardt's neurotic Russians.

He and Mr Huxley lay stress on the increase of freedom in sexual relations and in converse about such matters, which are signs of the "post-war" era, and of the influence of Freud. But after all, there is

nothing distinctively new about "three exquisite young men who had been sent down from Oxford" and "were supposed . . . to do all kinds of wicked and exciting things" and seemed much more interested in each other than in a certain Veronica, young men of this kind are no new thing. Yet Mr Goldring calls them 'annoyingly "post-war"' The exchange of 'improper' rhymes between young men and women is possibly a more genuinely post-war phenomenon, as well as the increasing tendency (granted that it has been increasing) of persons to elope with other men's wives,—though this again is no new thing.

Some of his characters recall some of Mr Huxley's sufficiently to tempt the influence-hunter, Morwenna in *Cuckoo*\* certainly belongs to the same set as Miss Thriplow in *Those Barren Leaves*, and the 'high-falutin' side of George Burnham, who has much to say on subjects like "cosmic consciousness," is not unrelated to the pseudo-mystical nonsense talked by a character (whose name I forget) in Huxley's *Chrome Yellow*. But, influence or no, the fact that

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\* This, and *Nobody Knows* may be had in the Tauchnitz edition.

both have concentrated on analogous types is worth nothing by itself. Mr Goldring is witty and more organic than Mr Gerhard, but, lacking the philosophic outlook of Mr Huxley, his brilliance more nearly approximates to the lesser virtue, if virtue it be, of smartness. “mamma is staying with a Bishop,” Veronica observed, “so I am quite safe!” or “you are too civilised, old top!” laughed Nina. “That’s your trouble,” are meaner beauties of a sort that recur pretty frequently. A third minor satirist of futility, Miss Rose Macaulay, tends also to run to smartness, though less so in her novels than in her essays. There is the true savour of wit—and thoughtfulness—in *Told by an Idiot*,\* but *A Casual Commentary* is a collection of the most sparkling fragments of journalism. The moral of the former book is something like that of the play *Milestones*, viz, that there is really but little to choose between the history of successive generations, any one of which will display very much the same characteristics as any other; but she goes on to conclude that this repetition is merely one instance of the law of cyclic change that

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\* Both in Tauchnitz

governs the cosmos "Perhaps all life was before long dustily to subside, leaving the ball, like a great revolving tomb, to spin its way through space" Against the inevitability of this law stands the nobility of man, although the tale of his life is "told by an idiot, and not a very nice idiot at that, but an idiot with gleams of genius and fineness. The valiant dust that builds on dust—how valiant, after all, that is." Thus both Mr Hardy and Miss Macaulay admit that man is capable of heroic conduct, whether it be that of Jude or of Rome Garden, in the face of destiny, but Miss Macaulay has no time to brood for long over the general issue, since she has the reputation of the "brilliant young woman writer" to maintain. She is the type *par excellence*, time after time she succeeds in achieving the glitter and hardness of the diamond, or of superb paste.

"Well, my dears, I have to tell you something. Poor papa has lost his faith again" ... "Really mama. It is too bad of papa. . . Mamma, *must* he lose it just this winter—his faith I mean? Can't he wait till next?"

The characterisation of Mrs. Hilary, a comically egocentric lady in *Dangerous Ages*,

is carried out with scintillations of the same lustre

“ ‘Complexes,’ read Mrs Hilary, ‘are of all sorts, and sizes ’ And there was a picture of four of them in a row, looking like netted cherry trees whose nets have got entangled with each other So that was what they were like Mrs Hilary had previously thought of them as being more of the nature of noxious insects, or fibrous growths with infinite ramifications Slim young trees Not so bad then, after all ” Such pertness is delightful, but after all it is but spoon-meat

#### IV.

We have seen how Mr Huxley, after finding in “ reality ” as commonly conceived, nothing but dissatisfaction, has begun to cast about him for a means of escape, not back into the fantasy of childhood, but forward to a somewhat problematical and less immediate reality, and passing on, we shall notice that other writers too are seeking as eagerly for freedom from this illusion, or for a more tolerable enchantment Mr D H Lawrence is among the most unrestful; obsessed with gloomy speculations about the appearances of life,—particularly the sexual

appearances, and, of these, particularly that of sex antagonism, he is driven demoniac-wise into the desert of the Primitive "nothing has any meaning Speech is like a volley of dead leaves and dust, stifling the air Human beings should learn to make weird, wordless cries, like the animals "

Rousseau started the "return to Nature" Tolstoi preached the savage simplicity of the peasant, Mr Lewis (though he seems to have recanted) emphasised the primitive nature of the artist as though that were especially desirable, Mr Lawrence is for weird animal cries, and the "heroine" of *St Mawr* escapes from her difficulties into the Rocky mountains Judging from style and general tone one may suspect Mr Lawrence's malaise to be of the romantic-sentimental order that is allied to *Weltschmerz* and the desire to be under any but the present conditions Who else but a sentimental-romantic could write

" the queer, half-sinister drop of his eyelids was curious, and the strange, wicked yellow flare that came into his eyes was almost frightening There was in the man a sort of sulphur-yellow flame of passion which would light up in his battered body



and give him an almost diabolical look" ?

Although this passage is fustian and deceives nobody, (i.e., it is meant to arouse in the reader an emotion that it does not arouse), it is worth studying in order to observe the cloven-hoof-marks of the mystagogue Queer, *half-sinister . . . almost* frightening *almost* diabolical, this is nothing else than the "eye-blurring" trick of which T. E. Hulme less justly accuses Tennyson. D. H. Lawrence may have genius and a sinister vision of life, but if he is going to serve it up in such vessels of dishonour, an intimate study of him will be —is, indeed,—a painful process. If we charge Mr. Wells with being slipshod, we must not exculpate Mr. Lawrence. Turning again at random to the same book (*The Lost Girl*),\* we read "This supercilious and impertinent exploration of the generation gone by, by the present generation, is nothing to our credit. As a matter of fact, no generation repeats the mistakes of the generation ahead." All these "—ations" clash on the ear as discordantly as "O fortunatam natam . ." etc., it is not rugged

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\* Martin Secker, 1920

but careless writing

Form and content, the two inseparables, reflect the same attitude. The art of isolating the sentimental from the slipshod, its enveloping dross, has yet to be perfected, but Mr Lawrence has moments in which he seems to be near the creation, certain absurdities being overlooked, of something beautiful out of this medium. Alvina, the lost girl, is unsatisfied until she mates with with the savage person whose "wicked yellow flare" is almost frightening, with him she retires to the 'primeval' Italian mountains. Hannele (of *The Captain's Doll*) promises to be the submissive squaw of her lover and to go to Africa with him; the Princess accompanies an uncouth person into the Rocky Mountains where she submits to his embraces, and so forth. What is the meaning of the regressive note that repeats itself so often in Mr Lawrence's work, of the primal scenery and the strangely unreal and "cinema-studio" sensualists, fierce and "half-sinister," who crop up frequently among groups of quite acceptable and recognisable character? The cinema-studio characters (The Princess, Romero, etc.) are men and women who exist only in Mr Lawrence's

lurid world, — men and women as, in his opinion, they should be, they are the impersonations of ideals that form the framework of the novels, and the spaces are filled up with persons from the actual world, — men and women as they are but should not be. In the actual world there is too much give and take, too much compromise, for Mr Lawrence, — the kind of thing he calls immoral. “The only morality,” he says, “is to have man true to his manhood” (and) “woman true to her womanhood,”\* neither must be nailed down to their mutual relationship. The actual world being too full of “nailing down,” a solution must be found in the shape of these personally conducted tours to wildernesses and solitary places, including Mexico.

Emotional bias, masquerading as judgment, is so insidious that one hesitates to pronounce Mr De La Mare to be a greater writer than Mr Lawrence, but the latter is without doubt too often heavy without being weighty, while Mr De La Mare seldom fails to remind us that he has drunk, and not once only, the milk of paradise. He is

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\* *Morality and the Novel*

indeed a permanent resident there, and to call him a novelist of escape is scarcely to speak truth, since, never having been immured in the prison of actuality, he has had no need to escape from it

His is the best kind of poet's prose, musical, but with no facile melody, adorned, but with decorum, undulating with grace and rhythm, seldom drooping, but sinking to rise the more boldly Mr Lawrence, it is true, writes poetry, but not of the sort calculated to—nor does it—improve his prose style, to Mr. De La Mare's, however, poetry seems to have joined beauties which are rare in the department of novel-writing

A passage from the preface to *Henry Brocken*\* will serve both to illustrate the style and introduce us to the Otherworld of his peregrinations, the boundaries of which he here defines

“He may, however, seem even more than bold in one thing, and that is in describing regions where the wise and the imaginative and the immortal have been before him For that he never can be contrite enough And yet, in spite of the

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\* Collins (1st edn, 1904)

renown of these regions, he can present neither map nor chart of them, latitude nor longitude can affirm only that their frontier stretches just this side of Dream, that they border Impossibility; lie parallel with peace "

✓ Here is a type of English grown out of tradition, Euphuism, Bunyan, the 17th century divines, Charles Lamb, held in succession the torch that, sputtering and scintillating at first, burnt with a clearer flame for more than a century, dimmed somewhat, but now still lights Mr De La Mare on his strange journeys *Henry Brocken* is a pilgrimage through lands imagined by famous English writers, through the territory of the Houyhnhnms, Herrick's Hesperides, or Bunyan's allegorical landscapes, and a series of visits to characters out of three centuries of fiction. Sojourn in the domain of literary fancy will mean escape for many, but salvation perhaps for a mere handful; and Mr De La Mare is among these fortunate few

The lyrical flavour of this book may be rather full for some palates; but at each evolutionary stage austerity increases—though there is never anything that could be termed austere writing, —until we arrive at a point

at which the process of steeping common objects, even trains, in the atmosphere, slightly disquieting, of the supernatural, is carried out at length with a subtle economy. In *Ding Dong Bell*,\* a narrative of epitaphs, the ghosts from the churchyard seem to invade the very railway station, time and again he arouses a little thrill (to use his own words) "not exactly of fear, but of concealed horror," which is more insidious than the grosser and more open horror of a tale like *Seaton's Aunt*, at his best he must dispense with such obvious effects to display the nicely adjusted balance of beauty with something for which the word "strangeness" is inadequate. This equilibrium is present in *Memoirs of a Midget*,\*\* in which some competent judges see, not without reason, the high-water mark of his achievement. possibly this is why the abnormal young lady whose adventures are there related, though she hails from beyond Dream and Impossibility, is more convincing than Mr Lawrence's heroines trembling before the fascination of their serpentine lovers. Mr De La Mare

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\* Selwyn and Blount, 1924

\*\* Collins

has found himself and his medium; it is doubtful if Mr Lawrence ever will

He has invited us to the regions of fantastic romance, of which he alone in this day can make anything acceptable, with a kind of introduction or apology, but Mr David Garnett sets in the midst of this common world, without any excuse and requiring none, the most wildly improbable events. A lady turns into a fox,\* a young man, after a love-quarrel, offers himself as a specimen for exhibition in a cage at the Zoo \*\* a sailor marries an African Princess, and brings her to live and die in an English village † But these portents are not so wonderful as the air of verisimilitude with which he recounts them. As he does so he keeps himself detached, cool, and collected, as though he were chronicling an ordinary day in the life of the Vicar of Wakefield. Indeed the cadences of his severely beautiful style re-echo a music that was more frequently heard in Goldsmith's time,—a music rich in all the tones that Lawrence lacks

\* *Lady Into Fox* (1922) (Chatto and Windus)

\*\* *The Man In The Zoo* " " "

† *The Sailor's Return* " " "

“ In this way William prepared to amuse and entertain the men who came to drink a quart of ale at his house For he loved all sports and pastimes himself, and on board ship had always found that they sweetened the voyage and prevented arguments and quarrels, and the hatching out of any kind of mischief, most of which comes, he would say, from dullness and lack of something to do ”

In the inherited yet individualised beauty of this style he offers a solution to the problem of finding a suitable instrument for the voice of the age, alternative to the telegraphic or truncated manner referred to above, but so far there has been, it seems, but little inclination to follow his lead The first two of his works are stories first and foremost; they depend for their success chiefly on the skill with which he renders them convincing and on the excellence of the language, the third is a tragedy “ of sore distress impenetrable ” Arising out of the inability of the insular rustics to adapt themselves to the new circumstance of having a negress in their village, disaster gradually accumulates until, with the catastrophe, William Target is killed, and his



black widow, now growing old and grotesque, becomes the miserable household drudge of the people who succeed her husband as managers of the inn that had been her home "She had learned to know her station in life, and she did her duty in it very well," are the last words he writes of this pitiable princess. The cruelty of the white "savages" is contrasted with the essential gentleness of the negress, who recognises the brutalities of her own land as such, and when asked if she looks forward to the hanging of her husband's murderer, replies that she has seen too much of death already. But the village women, worked up into a frenzy, come to set fire to her house, with shouts of "smoke them out," "Oh, the dirty nigger! Come and give her a singeing, boys! I'll make her dance, the ugly toad!" There is here, as is no doubt intended, food for thought, and the didactic character of this curious and poignant tale is clear enough. If Mr Garnett provides a way of escape, it is an 'exit' not so much from the ordinary occurrences of life as from the novelist's heresy, not indeed confined to novelists, that art must represent ordinary and everyday life, and must avoid "things that don't

happen", and from the converse heresy He rebuts both fallacies by combining the two elements \* The difference between his 'impossible' events and Mr Lawrence's 'impossible' characters is easily seen and requires no further comment in this book

## V

✓ England has produced, between the time of Aphra Behn and the present day, ✓ more women novelists, I would hazard, than any other country, a small proportion of whom deserve careful study, for they hold a position in fiction which has not yet been achieved by women in poetry, criticism, or drama; a state of things for which psychologists might perhaps have some explanation to offer But the layman need only scan the publishing lists to realise how congenial is the practice of novel-writing to the English feminine mind

Most of the more important ladies have been mentioned in certain contexts, but there still remain a few that stand above the general utility level Katherine Mansfield, who is widely read in Japan, largely on

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\* This combination is effectively maintained in his latest and rather more 'realistic' work *Go She Must*

account of the simplicity of her English, stands apart from a mob of brilliant women writers like Miss Dane, Stella Benson, E M Delafield, Romer Wilson, etc, by reason of the absence of the conflict which to a greater or lesser extent appears in the works of these others, She may or may not have so much to balance as some of them, but with what she has she is a better equilibrist Changing the metaphors to those of *Anonymity* (see above) we might say that her "surface" does not interfere with what comes from her "depth" Her attitude, in opposition to that of Lawrence or De La Mare, is to accept the facts of life, and the reason is, possibly, that she was not given to questioning and protesting, and that she felt herself competent to "pluck this flower, safety," out of the nettle of dangerous actuality; but the flower is a modest one

Any scene that she contemplates she absorbs completely, so that in reconstructing it none of the essentials are omitted; the less contemplative would have missed some of the essentials through incomplete absorption

"Her white skirt had a patch of wet, her neck and throat were stained a deep pink. When she lifted her arms big half-

hoops of perspiration showed under the armpits, her hair clung in wet curls to her cheeks" (*Bliss*\*)

To call this kind of writing melodic rather than contrapuntal might seem fantastic, but it may also help to suggest the lack of complexity which one feels (let us call it nothing more than feeling) when reading her, and which is not at all necessarily a virtue. But she has not been surpassed in the melodic style, and her untimely death cannot be too deeply deplored.

After reading "Rebecca West's" criticism one might have expected her to write something like Rose Macaulay, it is rather surprising, therefore, to open the *Judge*\*\* and to find, in parts of it, a feverishly lurid atmosphere reminiscent, if of anything, of Miss Sinclair. The reminiscence is strengthened by the presence of a Freudian problem—the relation of mother and child, the working out of which, together with subsidiary problems such as that of religious mania, leads to a highly melodramatic climax, Roger, the hated son and religious idiot, accuses Richard, the beloved son, of having caused

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\* Constable 1920 and later edns

\*\* (Hutchinson).

their mother's death through "his beastly lust" This occurring at the breakfast table, Richard kills Roger with the bread-knife Shortly afterwards he says to his wife, "Oh, between our mothers if we could have lived our own lives!", which is the text of the sermon It is a cumbrous homily, embracing as it does two worlds,—that of the three, ordinary dimensions, as in the first part that deals with Scotland; and that of mad melodrama on which there shines "the light that never was on sea or land" This second world, perhaps, is created something in the way that Miss Sinclair's otherworld was created, to meet a demand for stuff with which to materialise a view or experience that cannot be expressed in terms of recognisable types But her maniacs masquerade as recognisable types, i e., as people of this world, whereas they (Marion and her sons, Peacey,) affect us not merely by their inhumanity, but by their unreality. Surely the undesirability of the morbid emotional states that she chooses to illustrate might be adequately illustrated without splitting the ears of the groundlings A neuro-pathic study like this would be the more convincing if it hung on typical instances;

and, considering the large number of neuro-paths in the world who do not make all this sound and fury, hers can hardly be said to be typical. The Judge is a piece of special pleading delivered with unmistakable power and designed with an ambition that must be admired. It is Cecily Fairfield's first attempt at a long novel, faults in balance are therefore to be expected, while the fertility and strength which, not fully controlled, lead to certain excesses, will be duly appreciated.

Several other authoresses remain who have produced one or more books of sufficient merit to place them above the average level of fiction which Englishmen but no other nationals (Americans of course excepted) could read. Three books have appeared within the last ten years, all notable, all by women, and all dealing in their own different manners with musicians in Middle Europe—a curious coincidence, these were *Maurice Guest* by "H H Richardson," (a pseudonym), *Martin Schuler*, by Romer Wilson, and *The Constant Nymph* by Margaret Kennedy. If only any of the three could have maintained the creative effort through a set of twelve novels!—one might lament;

if only they could become as prolific as Mr Galsworthy or Mr Bennett, without losing the tone of these admirable single works Miss Wilson has written since,\* but without quite capturing the first lyrical grandeur (to avoid an hackneyed quotation) with which she astonished us all at the end of the war Miss Clemence Dane has, after the triumph of *Regiment of Women*, and the failure of *Legend*, taken to dramas of a rather shoddy type which, however well they may act, are the poorest reading. There was a little shoddiness even in *Regiment of Women*, whenever or one got away from the principal characters, since the richness of the book consists mainly in the flagitiousness of Clare Hartill, the "vampire" of her own sex. A certain thrill of scandal in the theme inflated, for the public, the value of this book beyond its true worth; just as Mr Waugh's *Loom of Youth* "boomed" because of its inside information about English public schools; allowing for this, Miss Dane's book is certainly the better of the two. But the tragedy in *Regiment of Women* cannot compete with that of *The Constant Nymph*. In the former book the horror of the child's

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\* cf *Latter-day Symphony* (Nonesuch Press.)

death is "religiously" compensated for by the final defeat of Clare Hartill, but in the latter, there is nothing to mitigate the shocking pitifulness of the conclusion, we find "all dark and comfortless" Mrs Delafield\* is "pleasant without scurrility, witty without affection, audacious without impudency," but she breaks no new ground, she provides at its best the type of novel that may beguile ~~the~~ the tedium of one, but not two, week-ends\* Comparison of her fiction with that of her mother (Mrs De La Pasture) might supply the student both with some amusement and the subject for a thesis

## VI

A fair, but by no means vast, amount of fiction dealing directly with the war was produced actually at the time, but most of this, like Ian Hay's *First Hundred Thousand*, was the merest journalism Wells's Mr Britling was strangely "au-dessus de la mêlée," *The Dark Forest* and *Sonia*, (the latter a poor thing), have been already mentioned England was unable to bring

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\* cf for example, *Zella Sees Herself* (1917), *Mrs Harter* (1924, in Tauchnitz)



forth a Barbusse or even a Duhamel. Since that time however a few war-books of undeniable merit have appeared. In 1924 Mr Mottram won the Hawthornden Prize with his *Spanish Farm*, following up his success with *Sixty-Four, Ninety-Four*<sup>1</sup> (1925) and *The Crime at Vanderlynden's* (1926),\* while Mr Ford Madox Ford's *No More Parades* (1926)<sup>†</sup>, an episode in his "Christopher Tietjens Saga," gives, besides a picture of that favourite character in British literature, the suffering hero, a sinister account of the intrigues that went on "at the back of the front." It is a tragedy with some of the machinery of the French farce,—i.e., of "goings-on" in suddenly darkened hotels, and the irruption of more or less inebriated officers into ladies' bedrooms, but there is besides this blood, politics, and the helplessness of men caught up into the imperfectly functioning machine of a modern army. If for a moment order took the place of chaos, "it all fell to pieces, the personnel scattered to the four winds by what appeared merely wanton orders, coming from the most

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\* all Chatto and Windus

\*\* Duckworth

unexpected headquarters, or the premises were smashed up by a chance shell that might just as well have fallen anywhere else

The finger of Fate ! ”

The tragedy that befalls the rather Christ-like Tietjens, whose wife is a sexual maniac, is again, good tragedy ; his spirit of self-denial very rightly undoes him, and, despite his efficiency and his ill health, gets him returned to duty in the trenches “ I have,” he says, “ to go underground somewhere If I went back to England there would be nothing for me but going underground by suicide ” Whether Mr Ford intended it or not, this corollary seems to attach itself quite naturally to his theorem,— “ martyrs deserve all they get.”

Mr Mottram’s trilogy (for such it is at present) deals mainly with the new or unprofessional soldier and the civilians through and about whose homes the war was waged, though he does not forget the professional view, narrow and intensely practical “ The present state of Europe, while verbally regretted or wondered at, did not scratch the surface of their minds ” War meant little more to them than the chance of promotion, pickings, and increased

pay Very different was the view of the temporary volunteer or conscript, who was concerned with the odds for and against re-employment, or at any rate with a highly problematical future, and to whom, as soon as the "Cease Fire" sounded, demobilisation became a most urgent matter Indignation meetings held by exasperated "other ranks," who were kept idle and uniformed long after hostilities had ceased, profoundly shocked those regular officers who were slow to appreciate the seriousness of "hanging 'em up for months and months, while other people get their jobs" Mr Mottram is a propagandist of points of view, and his three books constitute a majority report (the minority being in power) on active service conditions which the War Office might well note for future guidance He is ironical without bitterness, always reasonable, never hysterical; the sighs and groans that were essential to the make-up of the elder propagandist are nowhere to be heard Mr. Ford,\* on the other hand is all tenseness and *saeva indignatio*,—too protestant perhaps for the type of mind, now occurring pretty

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\* Formerly known as Ford Madox Hueffer

frequently, that objects to being impelled by an obvious emotional goad; and so perhaps he damages, if anything, the cause of the mission to which he confesses, viz, to bring about "such a state of mind as should end wars as possibilities" Mr Mottram's coolness conveys more effectively the varied disasters of war, rout, slaughter, mutiny, red tape, and the exaggeration of trifles (cf *The Crime at Vanderlynden's*) into menacing portents. While Mr Ford preaches a gospel, Mr Mottram pleads a cause, and the language of both is appropriate. But it just so happens that the prestige of the pulpit, as we have seen, has been gradually lowered during the last ten years.

While speaking of the appropriateness of language it may not be amiss to emphasise the fact that language-form, which includes the stress-and-length-arrangements of rhythm and intonation-patterns, counts enormously in the novel and the essay and, *a fortiori* even more in verse. It is this phonetic form, apart from the sense of the words, that first conveys the beauty of the creation to the reader, and it is this form which is generally the first thing to suffer destruction at the hand of the ordinary translator, and to be

missed by the foreign reader who is not a thorough student of the language. These two authors supply a case in point, the casual reader (of some other nationality) may quite well fail to perceive any radical difference between, say, *No More Parades* and *The Crime at Vanderlynden's*. They are both war novels, and both expose the faults and follies of official conduct, the other differences in content are incidental. So he might argue, and persuade himself that he had "settled" the English war novelists. Here, I think, is a potent argument in favour of the study of the oral and phonetic side of language, over which a bitter controversy is just now being waged in Japan.

## VI a

Mr Mottram's forensic ability brings to mind another new propagandist, Mr William Plomer, whose *Turbott Wolfe* was published by the Hogarth Press in 1925. It sets out the views, not of warriors, but of South African colonials and natives with clarity equal to and vividness certainly in excess of, the lucid and vivid Mr Mottram. If his technique can be said to be in any way inferior, the inferiority consists in an

occasional failure to assimilate or organise the material, thus, there are some excellent anecdotes, but they have rather the air of having been pasted in. The book is an examination of the colour problem, but it is ornamented with "rattling good stories" which certainly do not bear upon that problem, though this is not necessarily a drawback. Neither is it the main point to be considered, which is this; that ornament in a work of art must have a certain relation to the whole, must be interpretive or requisite to the totality of the experience. Whether it is made so or not depends on the assimilative or associative or architectural powers of the artist. but Mr Plomer, while certainly not devoid of those powers does not seem as yet to have developed them to the full. Thus the anecdote of the white lady who sold her charms to mine-owners and merchants by auction, or of Lord Fotheringhay who replied to a woman expostulating at the filthy state of his hands, "Madam, that's nothing. You should see my feet," are excellent, but are not *made* essential; and this is only slightly less true of the literary allusions and quotations. They are in themselves delightful tokens of the

author's intellectual wealth, which one would rather have than miss; only, one does not feel convinced that the blood of the living experience runs in their veins

Turbott Wolfe is in sympathy with the coloured inhabitants of South Africa, and so finds himself upon the horns of a dilemma. The first horn is the danger of being "sacrificed, a white lamb, to black Africa." . . . "Every civilised white man, who considers himself sensitive, in touch with native peoples in his daily life should hold in his heart an image of the failure of Gauguin. Was it a failure? I asked myself and in the question itself thought I suspected danger." The other horn is the hostility of the aggressively white man who calls all coloured people "niggers," and the officials who are perpetually on the look out for "bolshivism," and "dangerous thought." Mr Plomer maps out the battlefield passionately and reasonably. The unreasonable writer, for instance, would probably take the usual emotional line (if he were 'pro-black') of cursing the missionaries root and branch. But Mr Plomer demonstrates that while some brought the sacrament, and some the syphilis, there were also some who did a great

amount of good.

Mr Plomer, again, argues a case, and Mr Robert Nichols, again, declaims from the pulpit, which for him is too literally the drum ecclesiastic to be "beat with first" He preaches, at the beginning of *Fantastica*\* an excellent sermon in an aggravating style His mission, he tells us, is to make literature symbolic of the philosophic concept, and that this will not be accomplished by allegory, but by adjusting the philosophic truth to the truth of fable (such, practically, are his own words) So he will give us didactic stories that are something more than mere Aesop's Fables, and he will work by rules which he formulates The Credo begins—"Art and Science have the same end—the discovery of Truth,"✓and though he introduces later modifying clauses it remains doubtful whether he has wholly appreciated the difference between the truths of art and of science As an illustration, and possibly as a result, one might, pointing to these tales, declare that the only true part of them, artistically, was the tempestuous energy and the great though intermittent beauty of the language,

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\* Chatto and Windus, 1923



the liberation of a great force by a valuable vision; while the consciously didactic parts, Truth invading Heartbreak House, or Might-is-right against integration-Christ, are certainly very debatable, and possibly both arbitrary and cheap -It is not to this that we shall come for the salvation which, as he truly remarks, the poet (and presumably the writer of the philosophic *conte*) should dispense, but rather to the light that seems to break out between the lines "And yet, if the eye was not held, it could never somehow escape, being fractionally caught just for—well, just for the instant during which the famous financier" rose from his chair "propelled by an inner monition upon courses unknown or during the spellbound moments of silence shared in the descending life" This is by no means perfect, but it serves to convey some of the light and heat of Mr Nichols' draconic Muse The excitement is at its highest in the third and last tale *Golgotha & Co*, a fable of the second coming of Christ, in which Christ symbolises "the Integrating Factor in Human Evolution"; and the new Christianity will be called "Promethean Christianity" Mr Wells has already invented another kind of modern

Christianity; and, turning to the "Anti-Christ" problem, we see Mr Nichols exclaiming, after Belloc and Chesterton, at that hoary bogey, the servile state. It is the Epilogue to *Golgotha & Co* that unfortunately quenches our mental burning with speculations in a puerile manner that shocks all the more deeply because it is preceded by some really great and rare rhetoric, after which we are saddened with

✓ "The Ruling Classes!—would to God there could be born a giant to pull down their Collective pantaloons and give the holy posteriors a sound whipping." etc. It is enough to make one turn Tory, and more than enough to fill one with regret that Mr Nichols should neutralise by such cheap buffoonery the dignified effect of the true vatic utterance of which he has repeatedly shown himself to be capable. It is so seldom that a young writer, in yielding to a temptation to be "shocking," succeeds in being anything more than silly. But at least Mr Nichols has attempted the metaphysical story, and his gallant assault deserves something more than remembrance.

Perhaps there is no better example of the new didactic writing than Mr E M Forster's

*A Passage to India*,\* another piece of reasoned, poetic, and imaginative pleading Mr Forster is more experienced as a novelist than Mr Plomer, and his technique, as might be expected, surer and smoother. To a highly-developed sense of ironical justice in dealing with characters and situations he adds a keen because dispassionate, or rather, impersonally passionate descriptive faculty. One may hear such a remark as "it needs a true artist to convey atmospheres;" and when most people think of conveying the atmosphere of India, they think also of Mr Kipling, and by "atmosphere" they mean the romance of locality. But Mr Forster excels particularly in conveying the lack of atmosphere in India, and his artistry is very different in kind from Mr Kipling's. The latter is beyond doubt the best of his flashy and obviously clever sort; but Mr Forster, although the type of his subtle, insinuating art is in itself superior, has not attained to such an amazing peak of virtuosity. It is most regrettable, one would like to be able to say that *A Passage to India* is in every way a finer work than *Kim* (if, indeed the two can

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\* Edward Arnold & Co

be compared;) but while one might claim that it has a finer spirit, and that it is well written, one must admit that it is not so well written. The supreme artist who will show how immeasurably greater than anything of Kipling's are the works that can be produced in this idiom, has yet to appear. As things are at present, while confessing that "there were giants in those days," we can solace ourselves with the thought that they were bad giants.

Mr Forster is neither a Kipling nor a Tolstoi, but his intelligence is powerful, and he has besides something of the bardic quality which must not be looked upon as the exclusive property of verse. We may see the two functioning together.

"In Europe life retreats out of the cold, and exquisite fireside myths have resulted—Balder, Persephone—but here the retreat is from the source of life, the treacherous sun, and no poetry adorns it because disillusionment cannot be beautiful. Men yearn for poetry though they may not confess it, they desire that joy shall be graceful and sorrow august and infinity have a form, and India fails to accommodate them. The annual helter-skelter of April, when irritability and

lust spread like a canker, is one of her comments on the orderly hopes of humanity."

The purpose of the book is apparently to illustrate the baffling elusiveness of India, and the hopelessness of trying to effect any good understanding between the average public-school-bred civil servant and the native population, while the white sympathiser with coloured India is not only ostracised by his own people, but perpetually misunderstood by the natives with whom he wishes to become intimate, as in Africa, so in India. Yet India seems to be more mysteriously puzzling; it escapes the seeker, vanishing like a ghost. "Nothing in India is identifiable, the mere asking of a question causes it to disappear or to merge into something else." The country is unconquered, from main roads one passes to branch roads and thence into triumphant chaos, the towns are but monuments of defeat. "Nothing embraces the whole of India", and again, the very earth is uncontrollably inhuman. It is too old for anything so human as ghosts or spirits; the ghastliness of the symbolic Marabar caves is their polished emptiness, their echo which degrad-

es all articulated sounds into an ugly and inhuman booming "Devils are of the North, and poems can be written about them, but no one could romanticise the Marabar because it robbed infinity and eternity of their vastness, the only quality that accommodates them to mankind" This horror of emptiness seems to have a more deluding effect on human beings than anything else, and so an English woman enters one of the caves, from which she emerges in a panic, believing that she has been assaulted there by an Indian named Dr Aziz. Actually there was nothing there but emptiness and the evil echo, she recollects this as the case comes on at the local court, and withdraws the charge. But out of this nothing have arisen hatreds, exacerbations of race antipathy, riots and cruelties; these polished ovoid caves seem to be the matrices of some malignant force, which is Nothingness—the only genuine devil,—or perhaps, the only genuine devil where Europeans are concerned.

The pretensions of "brown" and "white" are dealt with altogether impartially. Neither are in the least angelic, indeed, a reading of the book leaves an impression of the

predomiant beastliness in both. Either will go to any length of turpitude in order to "save face", and are practically incapable of acting (with, of course a few exceptions) from any other motives than those of emotional prejudice. But if anything, logic and intellect are distrusted more deeply by the white "philistines and barbarians" than by the brown. "Nothing enrages Anglo-India more than the lantern of reason if it is exhibited for one moment after its extinction is decreed." How universally applicable is this and, in fact much comment in the book; so that one may suspect that not only the Indians and the "superior" Anglo-Saxons, but the world in general suffers from an excess of this "all-too-human" unreason which is still composed chiefly of herd-instincts.

Mr Forster shows himself to be, besides what has been mentioned already, a pillar of the cause of those who try to create something of value out of the graceless material of life, in opposition to those who seek for escape, and his and Mr Plomer's creations suggest that what is true of the didactic poem is also true of the problem novel, namely, that the value of didactic lies

innocent of all philosophical log-rolling, these stories bring nothing but their charm which is such that Mr Nichols' fables, stripped of their exalted *arrières pensées*, could not compete with it. That family sense of the picturesque, that unusual awareness of colour and texture, which is no doubt for many the chief attraction of Sitwellian poetry, has helped him with common-place matter like murder or the shabby genteel, and the malice of the fun that he pokes at contemporary celebrities and others, while not a mere imitation of Beerbohm, preserves some aroma of the last Victorian decade. The book is an exhibition of a most laudable kind of virtuosity, rather wasted, one feels, upon unnecessarily trivial themes. If only he could have abandoned his parrots revealing murder and his old ladies of Scarborough, and have changed places with Mr Nichols as an exponent of the *conte philosophique* ! But we know that he never could truly assume the aloof and chasuble of Mr. Nichols, the touch of Voltairean sharpness in his make-up is sufficient to keep him from the pulpit. In this respect he has something in common with Norman Douglas, with whom, however, he is more injurious as a satirist ;



and even those who did not know it for a fact might easily guess that Douglas has contributed something towards his education. *Triple Fugue* is so obviously the product of a restless and experimental stage that it affords data for the estimation of potentialities only; all the riches of descriptive exuberance and caricature are there, but unapplied as yet to a worthy subject, and there is little evidence of skill either at plot or at characterisation.

His first long novel, *Before the Bombardment*, (Duckworth, 1926) draws one's attention to two separate but cleverly reconciled manners which here consolidate themselves with success; the one being the malicious and at times broadly farcical social satire which is Osbert's in particular, the other the glittering décor which, allowing for personal interpretation, is common to the genus Sitwell. In the former vein he ranges from the acidities of Miss Bramley, who sings cheap sentimental songs of the Edwardian era, and overreaches herself in her jealous and testamentary designs on an old lady, to uproarious characters like Mrs. Shrubfield, an alcoholic given to undressing, and so reminiscent of Miss Wilberforce in *South Wind*, or Colonel Spofforth, legitimate

descendant of Major Bagstock (cf. *Dombey and Son*) and a member of the clan of low comedy colonels that are so highly esteemed by fun-loving Britons. He talks, of course, in this fashion

"There we sat, by Jove, in the Club, .....absolutely unable to move, doncherno. Punkah-wallah, black chap, doncherno, suddenly dropped the punkah and ran away, you know 'Where's that damned nigger?' I cried. What, what . "

To balance this, the décor is used cut up into lengths that are not always sufficiently brief. The prose of both Osbert and Sacheverell Sitwell, is often so heavily loaded with such ornament in the laudable attempt to enrich it, that it sometimes nearly assumes the appearance of having been stuffed. It is aesthetically satisfying up to a certain point, beyond which the hardest intellectual stomach must begin to feel distress.

"The platform, on which the band was to play, the gilt decoration of the ball-room, would become unrecognisable beneath the binding green chains and cobwebs of smilax, damply clinging as the hair of mermaids, while the five-pointed red tinsel flames of numerous poinsettias would crackle round

the edge of the ball-room like so many young bonfires ”

The method of description, of deftly abducting a scenic passage from the plane of naturalism, in the direction of that of rococo, is highly stimulating, but like all stimulants, it soon becomes a vice with excessive use. Modern English fiction can stand a great deal more adornment in “non-naturalistic styles”, just as it can stand more of the allusiveness and erudition that is being re-introduced into poetry with the happiest results; but, crammed into a few books, it will merely be wasted as the less conscientious readers skip page after page of it in the search for incident or satire, and it is certainly too valuable to waste. The importance of *Before the Bombardment* lies rather in this element than in the characterisations and satirical narrative, since Osbert Sitwell is not yet so great a master of human motive, of the subtle dissection or synthesis of the human heart, as he is of rendering the the significance of inanimate objects. It is in this latter department that he has made a substantial advance on *Triple Fugue*. The persons are more elaborately portrayed, it is true; but they still give something of the

two-dimensional effect of the ancient fresco. Yet this is not saying—or need not be saying that, *quâ* work of art, they are deficient; we are apt to become enslaved to the illusion of three dimensions, and the “flat” method has its claims no less than any other

Mr. Paul Selver is as incurably unromantic as Mr Sitwell, but not so prone to be led away by the picturesque, realistic, and capable of prolonging an effort of concentration, he can be witty without fluttering round his subject with an elegantly Walpolian air. His *Schooling* (Jarrold, 1924) besides being rather humorously suggestive of a pantomim, is a deft admixture of such quasi-bohemianism as centres itself on the Café Royal, and the sordidness of a provincial secondary school; an absurd liaison with a disreputable widow crowns the banquet. Mr Selver has the art of making his characters at the same time disgusting and ridiculous, and of demonstrating that on either score there is little to choose between pharisee and sinner. The satire on futility and the dialogue, which embraces discussion of artistic matters, might suggest superficial resemblances with Huxley, or with Gerhardt, both of which one could hear, in imagination, this author indignantly deny.

## VII

The two last-mentioned novelists, while they are in no sense the greatest figures in the "post-war" literary field, nor of any host encamped therein, have devoted their not inconsiderable gifts, which include an allowance of that tough-mindedness already noticed, to the intellectualist cause, and as we look back on the multitude of its adherents, even as named in these pages, we are impressed with the size and efficiency of the personnel that they compose. Have we, after all, a solid intellectualist body of novel-writers? At one moment one is tempted to reply in the affirmative, but their remarkable heterogeneity (which I have attempted to illustrate) raises the question of their solidarity, but then again, we are dealing, not with a school or herd, not with a community, but with individuals who may, each in his own manner, be sighting for the same target. If so, we have an unanimity superior to that of any herd, however highly organised. Or it may be that there is no target, visible or desiderated, but a chain of circumstances compelling literature away from its recent traditions. There is the

revolt, which quite possibly is not permanent, against Romanticism and Naturalism; and its natural sequence, a drift towards balance and serenity. This will affect some but not Mr Joyce. There will be also, as a result of the more deliberate and intellectual mood now setting in, a tendency to use 'romantic' and 'classic' elements as a painter does his colour; of such "unromantic romanticism" we may see good examples in a book which is not a novel, — Mr Sacheverell Sitwell's *Southern Baroque Art*. Then again, it could scarcely be conceded that several generations of intensive scientific thought have passed without leaving any mark whatsoever on literary method. It is obvious enough that psychological problems are coming to be dealt with in fiction with an air of greater efficiency, and that psychoanalysis has deeply influenced the work of many who may be included in the sections under review; but besides this there may perhaps be seen a greater care of observing and weighing (whether of things seen or personal intuitions) and of setting down, a more careful deliberation as to what is and what is not valuable, than is consistently present in 'great' men like Wells or

Bennett Finally one must consider how far contemporary foreign literature has exerted its influence in England On the one side there is Russia with Tchekov, Dostoevski, Andreev, and so on, a formidable power which would hardly be likely to make for coolness and serenity On the other France, with Aragon or Proust, (but not Cocteau) would no doubt act as a corrective to excessively unclassical attitudes To judge from the large number of translations of modern French novelists now being advertised in the *Times Literary Supplement* and elsewhere, one might conclude, in the absence of statistics, that France is just now in the ascendant Everyone with intellectual pretensions has read something or other by Proust, and has learnt how even the darker problems of psychology may be treated with elegance Had Proust tackled *Ulysses*, what grace he would have imparted to it! And we feel that he was eminently qualified to do so

Perhaps all that we can say is that there are a good many young authors who have left the more emotive for the less emotive manner of writing, and that they may be leading us toward a literature as far removed

from Victorianism as Addison's was from mediaevalism. It would be interesting to hear more of M. Cazamian's pronouncements on the subject. We shall find him approaching the question, which may already have suggested itself to us, of how far the English "neo-intellectualism" can be styled intellectual, but he too is confronted with the difficulty of heterogeneity which impedes the formulation of a general dictum. Thus he selects as typical of the "modern" movement Imagism and the style of Joyce, and we can at once reply that these are not typical. But would anything else be more typical? if he had chosen Mr. Huxley or Mr. Garnett would he have been nearer the mark? Be that as it may, he concludes that at first sight, the 'modernism' perceptible in Imagism and Joyce is derived from neo-romanticism in its last and exhausted stages; but on a closer inspection, "*les recherches des jeunes écrivains les plus originaux révèlent une intellectualité énergique, et semble-t-il même, dominante*" He proceeds to the discovery of the apparent paradox of literature that is simultaneously neo-classic and neo-romantic, a complexity likely on the whole to be detrimental. He expresses doubt



as to whether, from the application of intellectuality to "un fond d'instincts saturé d'un romantisme devenu chronique," the birth of pure literature (whatever he means by that), and the simple joy of a renewal of absolute art, will be possible "Le néo-classicisme qui semble se préparer en Angleterre serait corrompu à sa source même par l'intime fusion des eaux romantiques . . . Le romantisme serait désormais incurable, et triompherait dans les victoires mêmes qui sont remportées sur lui "

One weak point in his contention is the assumption that, to put it baldly, complexity must lower vitality, which smacks not a little of superstition, one has but to turn back to the Seventeenth Century, to the parallel complexities that were not too grievous a burden for Donne and Milton and an host of others, to see that such a state of things, so far from being disadvantageous to the production of the most vital literature, may even prove to be favourable. Indeed, M Cazamian so far modifies his statement as to add that complexity is a resource of art, even though it conduces to something less vigorous than his "pure literature" and "absolute art," — both of which, surely,

are conceptions of a very questionable nature

Further, he seems to regard romanticism as a chronic disease from the clutches of which our neo-classicists are struggling vainly to free themselves. This strikes one as being rather a fanciful view; and it would be more satisfactory, in attempting to describe 'romanticism' figuratively, to call it, as one does fire, a good servant but a bad master.

English literature, then, has arrived at a stage of complexity roughly parallel to that of the pre-Restoration part of the seventeenth century, though the present complexity is, of course, vastly more labyrinthine. One highly important factor of differentiation between the Caroline and the Georgian periods is the presence in the latter of a large "low-brow" but literate public, the fruit of successive acts of educational legislation since 1870. It may be safely claimed in general that this public hardly touches the fringe of the "left" of modern literature, it reads neither Miss Richardson nor Mr Nichols, it is scarcely conscious of the existence of Mr Richards or Mr Read. It is content with very little poetry and practically no criticism; for

mental recreation it goes to the daily papers, the illustrated magazines and the novels of writers like Miss Dell, Mr Hutchinson, or Mr Oppenheim. In short, the Intelligentsia seem to be producing a type of art that is obnoxious to the populace, obnoxious either because of its nature *quâ* art, or because the populace are not sufficiently educated to understand it. While the latter is probably the chief reason, the former cannot altogether be dismissed as an absurdity; among the populace there may be some embryonic ideas of art which have not yet been expressed as they should. A social revolution, sudden or gradual, is bound to cause a radical change in artistic formulae, for better or worse, and few things can be more difficult than an attempt to forecast the vicissitudes through which English literature may pass during the remainder of the present century.

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